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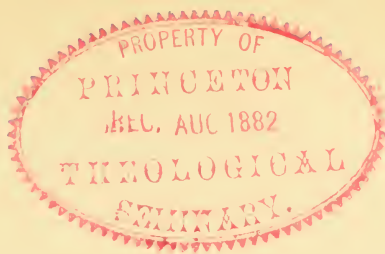
SYNOPTICAL LECTURES  
ON THE  
BOOKS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

*FIRST SERIES,*  
GENESIS—SONG OF SONGS.

BY THE  
✓  
REV. DONALD FRASER, M.A.

NEW YORK:  
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## INTRODUCTION.

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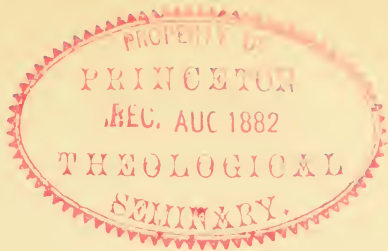
THOUGH I have never been very successful in reproducing fully and vividly what I have spoken, I venture to offer to the public the substance of a course of Lectures delivered from the pulpit. It is my persuasion, that alike for the edification of the Church, and for the defeat of scepticism, the Bible must have full scope and fair play, and be taught to the people, not so much in detached verses, called "texts," as in the large sweep of its revelation, its vast dimensions of thought, and wonderful grasp of Divine ideas and human interests and hopes.

The books that are the noblest and most influential are remarkable for the breadth of soul they reveal—their width of sympathy, range of survey, and power of various suggestion. But the Book of God is above all. It gives our thought the widest horizon—brings to our affections the richest food and sweetest sympathy—takes mind, conscience, and reason off the shallows, and permits us to "launch out into the deep." As we study the Holy Bible, a sense of its exceeding breadth and manifoldness grows upon us. We find in it much more than statements to

settle our doubts, or promises to stay our fears. The Book is divinely large. Nothing escapes it. There is no problem in the moral and spiritual sphere—no sin or duty—no sorrow or joy, on which it does not cast some light. No real want of man is overlooked in it; nor is there any truth essential to be known which is not enclosed, or suggested, in its far-reaching words.

The proof-text system of dealing with Scripture has been pernicious, in so far as it has induced fragmentary knowledge, capricious interpretation, and the severance of sentences and clauses from their proper connection in order to sustain a dogmatic position or controversial point. Now there is certainly great reward in searching the Scriptures minutely; but they must be searched impartially and surveyed comprehensively, if we would escape from mere theological ruts and hard narrow lines of thought, and would reach clear sweet healthy views of God's truth with largeness of soul and freshness of devout affection.

With these convictions, I feel it my duty, as a "Pastor and Teacher" of the Church, to discourse of the Bible at large. My plan is to indicate the scope of each Book of Scripture, and to furnish in brief a compend or digest of its contents. To dilate were an easy task, but it would weary my hearers, deter my readers, and defeat my object. Therefore I have subjected my matter to rigorous compression; and, though I am far better pleased with my plan than with my execution of it, I hope, with God's blessing, to persevere until I have completed a synopsis of the whole Bible.



## A FEW WORDS ON THE CANON.

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ALL our English Bibles contain a list entitled, "The Names and Order of all the Books of the Old and New Testaments, with the number of their chapters." According to this list, there are thirty-nine Books in the Old Testament, twenty-seven in the New.

Every one knows that this list is not itself a part of Scripture; and it is a legitimate question, To what degree of respect or confidence is it entitled, and why do the Books therein enumerated—these, and none but these—constitute Holy Writ? This is just the question known as that of "the Canon of Scripture." The Greek word, *κανών*, standard, or rule, came in ecclesiastical usage to denote an authorised list, whether of books, decrees of councils, or clergy. Whatever was accredited and approved in the Church was termed canonical. Books of Scripture were so called, as proper to be read in the Christian assemblies. Non-canonical books were those disallowed and excluded, as being either spurious productions, or, if genuine and good for private reading, yet apocryphal or hidden books, the authority of which was not evident, and



which, therefore, had no just claim to be placed in the sacred Canon, the standard of faith and practice.

The Canon, as we have received it, shows a most varied collection of Hebrew and Greek works—histories, poems, tracts, prophecies, and letters, written at intervals during sixteen centuries, by many writers known and unknown; and among those who are known, men of every rank and condition—prophets, kings, priests, a scribe, a sheep-master, a tax-gatherer, a physician, a tent-maker, and two or three fishermen. The volume which we call the Bible grew slowly under their hands, and was separated from other religious writings by degrees. So God ordered it; so it seemed good in His sight.

Our doctrine of the Canon is, that the collection of Books, which we bind up together, constitutes the authentic and complete Bible, the authoritative fountain of our religious knowledge. But this does not involve, and should not be allowed to imply, or understood to cover, the opinion, that all the Books in the collection are of equal value, or equally full of the mind of God, or equally applicable in their teachings to the time in which we live. They are all sacred, as separated to holy use from the mass of even religious literature; all profitable, but not all equally profitable; and all to be read with reverence, but at the same time with intelligent recognition of the progress which is in the Bible itself, and in the order and brightness of Divine dispensations of truth.

I. The Old Testament we receive in its integrity from the Jews. It affects Israel and the nations, and prepares the way of Christ and the Church. Its foundation is in the Law, or the Five Books at the outset, ascribed to

Moses. Subsequent history, poetry, and prophecy evidently presuppose and proceed upon the Pentateuch. Therefore, from earliest times down to this day, the Hebrews have paid peculiar veneration to the Law.

The Historical Books, from Joshua to Esther, with the single exception of Nehemiah, are of anonymous authorship to us, though it is quite probable that the writers were well known at the time of their admission to the Canon. The works of David, Solomon, and the prophets, were easily identified. And all were gathered together under the divisions of the Law, the Prophets, earlier and later, and the Hagiographa. At what time this was done, we have no certain knowledge; but the Jewish tradition is not improbable, which ascribes the editing and arranging of the Old Testament to Ezra, the learned Scribe.

The Hebrew Canon was well and even jealously guarded by the Jews of Palestine; but was not held in the same definite form by the Hellenist Jews. Those of Alexandria used the Greek translation made by the Seventy; and in that version were certain additions to the Books of Job, Esther, and Daniel, which were unknown to the Hebrew text, and certain other books, as of Wisdom, and the Maccabees, which never existed in Hebrew, and are known among us as the Apocrypha.

A very important testimony to the Hebrew Canon is given by the Jewish writer on history and antiquities—Josephus. It runs thus: “We have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times, and are justly held to be divine.”—“No one has been so bold as to add

anything to these writings, or take anything from them, or make any change in them ; but it is become natural to all Jews, immediately, and from their birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.”\* The twenty-two books, as Josephus computed them, are just our thirty-nine, for the two Books of Samuel were one, two of Kings one, two of Chronicles one, the minor prophets one, Ezra was joined to Nehemiah, Ruth to Judges, and Lamentations to the greater work of Jeremiah. The Books in the Canon are said to have been thus numbered twenty-two, in order to correspond, like the parts of the 119th Psalm, with the Hebrew alphabet. At a later period, the number was given as twenty-four, the Books of Ruth and Lamentations being allowed separate places in the list.

Our Old Testament is thus received from that people to whom “were committed the oracles of God.” The Lord so ordered it in His providence, that the Jews should honour this collection of Books above and apart from all others, and should scrupulously protect them from addition or excision by man. They have preserved them, even to their own condemnation.

We have yet greater witness. It was of this Old Testament that Jesus Christ said, “Search the Scriptures.” In its three great divisions He recognised it, when, after His resurrection, He taught from “the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms.” And of this part of the Canon it was that the Apostle Paul declared, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

It is a singular fact that the Jews never injured or cor-

\* Answer to Apion, Book i.

rupted the Old Testament Scriptures which reprove them; and the Latin Church never injured or corrupted the New Testament Canon by which its superstitions are rebuked. But the Latin Church has interfered with that Canon which the Jews so diligently guarded. The Latin version, called the Vulgate, had contained the Apocrypha. The Council of Trent, in 1546, pronounced all the contents of the Vulgate equally canonical and authoritative; and thus were eleven books or parts of books, which the Jews of Palestine excluded from their Canon, put by arbitrary decree of a modern council on a level with Moses and the Prophets. We do not assert that this was done for dogmatic and controversial reasons; but it is obviously convenient for the Church of Rome that, as there is no authority for purgatory, the merit of works, or prayers of the living for the dead in Holy Writ properly so called, books from which quotations in favour of these things can be made—*e.g.*, Baruch, Tobit, Ecclesiasticus, and the Maccabees—should be elevated to canonical dignity. The Eastern Church long maintained the distinction between Canonical Scripture as the rule of faith, and other books useful for edification. A Council at Jerusalem, in 1672, canonised the Apocrypha; but there is no decision on the subject binding the Eastern Church to this day. The Reformed Churches with one accord repudiated the canonicity of the Apocrypha, although it was long the custom in England, and still is in Germany, to bind up those books in the same volume with Holy Scripture.

II. The history of the Canon of the New Testament is quite analogous to that of the Old. Like the earlier collection, it grew silently, and was formed and settled, as we

now have it, by general consent of the Christians in the first three centuries of the Church. The decision was not made by an apostle, or arrived at by any special Divine afflatus for the purpose, but was reached more gradually, and, on that account, all the more convincingly and impressively, by the mature examination and deliberate judgment of the Christian Church, under the directing Providence and living Spirit of God.

The four Books, with which the New Testament opens, called Gospels, bear the same relation to those which follow, that the five Books at the beginning of the Old Testament, called the Law, bear to the subsequent Hebrew Scriptures. They are the pillars that support all that is afterwards recorded. They were produced in the first century, and there is very good evidence that during the second century they were widely known and circulated as genuine Gospels. There were others in circulation too, but they never had the same reception or repute, and have long ago fallen into oblivion, or been recognised as of little worth. Some of the books which we receive were in question for a considerable time, viz., the Epistle to the Hebrews, James, 2d Peter, 2d and 3d John, Jude, and the Revelation. At last all these were acknowledged; and the hesitation shown in regard to them only increases our confidence in their authority, as satisfying us that whatever could be alleged against them was considered in the time of the first publication and found to be of no weight, and also as proving the extreme deliberation and caution with which the Greek Canon, equally with the Hebrew, was made up and defined. It was ascertained that all the Books admitted to the Canon proceeded from Apostles, or were written in the

first age, in harmony with the spirit and oral teachings of the Apostles of the Lamb.

A Council at Laodicea, A.D. 365, forbade the reading of uncanonical books in Churches; and a catalogue is found appended to the decrees, which corresponds exactly with our list—except as regards the Book of Revelation, which is omitted. The so-called Council of Carthage, A.D. 397, enumerates the Books exactly as we have them. We do not cite the acts of any council as conferring authority on any part of Scripture, but we value them as historical evidence, that, in the fourth century, the Books acknowledged by the Christians of the East and the West were the same that we honour—all the same, and none besides.

The manner in which the Canon has been formed confessedly leaves scope for difficult questions. God has ordered that so it should be, in order to exercise the moral faculty, spiritual discernment, and loving submission of His children.

(1.) Is the Bible or the Church the greater? It is a useless question. The Holy Ghost is the Great One of this dispensation. It is the Holy Ghost who, by the Word spoken and written, formed the Church, and by the Church formed the Bible. The Bible exists for the Church, not the Church for the Bible; but then the Church exists only by virtue of that word of truth which the Bible enshrines and preserves.

(2.) Does the formation of the canon by the Church involve the necessity of a traditional Church interpretation? Surely not. Least of all, does it imply what is arrogated by the Latin Church, that she alone is authorised to interpret the Scriptures. We acknowledge ourselves in



debted to the Primitive Church, especially in the East, for the historical authentication of the Books of the New Testament; but we do not on that account feel bound to accept traditional interpretations of the Church of the dark ages, any more than we receive traditional interpretations of the Old Testament from the Jewish Talmudists.

(3.) If the catalogue of Books was drawn up by men like ourselves on their best, but fallible, judgment, may it not be revised or altered by us? We should not fear to subject the Bible to such an ordeal, assured as we are, that, whatever individuals might propose, no Christian Church would part with any one Book or part of a Book in our present Bible. But the question cannot claim an affirmative answer. We are not, and no future generation can possibly be, in such favourable circumstances as the early Christians were, for testing the authenticity and genuineness of writings ascribed to Evangelists and Apostles. The Canon has passed the very best court of examination that could possibly be constituted; and with this it becomes us to be content.

The use of the term "Bible" to denote the whole collection of Sacred Writings, cannot, we believe, be traced to an earlier date than the fourth century. But, now that the collection is made, each generation sees for itself how thoroughly the Books form one Book, structurally and spiritually one, marvellously woven together—its most distant parts connected by quotations, allusions, and the correspondence of type and antitype—and the whole moulded together by a profound unity of thought and plan. It is not mechanically combined or sewed to-



gether. It is organically united as a living tree, or as a living body of which one part cannot be touched without affecting all. God has tempered all together, so that if one member of the Bible suffer, all its members suffer with it. It may be persecuted, neglected, maligned, or controverted, but the Scripture may not be broken. Destructive criticism may go to work on it with its penknife, as did the infatuated king of Judah on the roll of Jeremiah's prophecy; but when penknife and fire have done their worst, the writing is calmly restored as it was before. Our Bible cannot be taken to pieces, or dissolved into its elements. Here are many Books—and yet the Book is one—

With the eternal heraldry  
And signature of God Almighty stamped  
From first to last.

Happy they who recognise the stamp, and, while giving due weight to the historical evidences of the Canon, know the Bible true by an inward moral conviction and spiritual witness—who appreciate the character of its contents, “the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God;” the tone it has, which it has received from no other book, but with which it has influenced minds and books innumerable; and its singularly penetrating living power over the human heart!



## SYNOPTICAL LECTURES.

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### GENESIS.

THE Jews have no title for this book but its first word—*Bereshith* (in the beginning). The Greeks called it *Genesis* (origination). It was a saying of Luther, "*Nihil pulchrius Genesi, nihil utilius;*" and all thoughtful men have recognised the value and dignity of this book as "the stately portal to the magnificent edifice of Scripture."

It is the oldest trustworthy book in the world, and conveys all the reliable information we possess of the history of man, for more than two thousand years. The *Vedas* are ancient hymns and legends: the *Zendavesta* is a speculation on the origin of things: but *Genesis* is a narrative, written with a grave archaic simplicity. It is characteristically a book of origins and beginnings,—it contains the deeply-fastened and widely-spread roots of all futurity. There is nothing afterwards unfolded in the relationships of God with man, that is not at least in rudiment, or germ, to be traced in Genesis.

By the Jews the authorship of this book has always

been ascribed to Moses; but it is a point which recent critics have strongly disputed and denied. The truth probably lies between the extreme view of those, on the one hand, who hold that Moses alone wrote the entire book exactly as it now exists in the Hebrew Bible, and the extreme, on the other hand, of those who break up this book into a collection of two, three, or more ancient writings put together, in or after the time of King David. To our thinking, the whole style and tenor of this work show it to be of a far earlier date than the times of the Hebrew monarchy, and we see no good reason to question its Mosaic authorship, although it may have passed through the editorial hands of another prophet. As to the alleged traces of various authors in the use of different names of the Deity, *Elohim* and *Jehovah*, and the occasionally abrupt insertion of passages, there is no difficulty in accounting for these things on the very natural supposition that Moses availed himself of traditions and documents of earlier times than his own, and writing with a holy simplicity, pieced them together without any concealment. Need we say that the place of this book in the canon is not invalidated by any such view of its authorship? It is no point of faith that every passage in Genesis came first into existence when written by the pen of Moses, any more than it is a point of faith that Samuel wrote without any use of other records the whole Book of Judges. We must not commit ourselves, in the supposed defence of the Bible, to positions which cannot be satisfactorily proved, and which it is not in the least necessary to prove. Enough for us, that Genesis has always been in the canon of Holy Scripture, and that the writer, whether in communicating

fresh truth, or in compiling from pre-existing fragments of history, was so divinely guided as to form, for all time coming, a religious narrative of "the first things" on which our faith may implicitly rely.

That it is a *religious* history accounts for various features of this book which may disappoint the mere archæologist, such as the slight and incidental manner in which the general annals of the world are referred to, and the prominence given to the lives of the Hebrew patriarchs. Genesis does cast more light than any other book whatever on early history, geography, and ethnology, but this only by the way,—its proper object being to unfold the religious history of mankind, and to record the origin of that nation in which the true knowledge of God was preserved during long ages of ignorance and idolatry.

That it is an *ancient* history, written, though under divine direction, by a man who lived more than three thousand years ago, in accordance with the general information he possessed, accounts for the simple, popular way in which great natural facts are stated, and for the sketching out of the order of Creation in large and graphic outlines. It is no reproach to the book that it is unscientific in language, *i.e.*, a stranger to the technical terms and details of modern sciences. This is just as it ought to be, if we keep in mind the times in which, and the purposes for which, it was composed. It would be most incongruous if anything but popular language were employed in so ancient a book to express physical phenomena. Indeed, the artlessness of the narrative forms alike one of its best evidences and one of its principal charms. We are not to peer into it, as into a highly-elaborated cabinet picture. It

is a simple but magnificent sketch, where the outlines are of the boldest, and the grouping and colouring declare a master's hand.

In the beginning was God. He only has had no origin,—never began to be,—but from everlasting to everlasting was, and is, and is to be. It may be right enough to construct arguments for the divine existence, in order to convince gainsayers and sceptics, but it would not be in harmony with the character of the Bible to open with any doubt or discussion on such a point. God, who is in a high sense the Author of Scripture, does not argue His own existence any more than a human author begins his book by proving that he himself actually lives. God is. What is the conclusion of long arguments elsewhere is the starting-point of the Bible. The name of God is stamped on the forehead of His book.

The first sentence of Genesis excludes many errors. (1.) Atheism,—for God created; (2.) Polytheism,—for it is one God who created all; (3.) The notion of the eternity of matter,—for the things which are seen had a beginning. We know not how remote the beginning may have been, but we are assured that the very materials, as well as the present forms of things, exist, because God made them. (4.) Pantheism,—for God has made all things, and is in all, yet is never to be confounded with even the whole of things and of life—the Universe. An author must not be confounded with his work, or a builder with his building, or an artist with his masterpiece;—so God, while the Author, Builder, and Maker of all, and sustaining and conserving what He has produced, is not

absorbed in nature, but, as He was before all, so now is He above all, blessed for ever.

God being revealed, Genesis informs us of eight great beginnings of things,—beginnings of which, without this book, we have no satisfactory knowledge whatever.

I. ORIGIN OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.—This subject was a dark enigma to all the men of thought in the heathen world, but the Hebrew Scriptures open with the decisive statement, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. To this day nothing more has been discovered. However explorers and speculators spread out the ages that are past into periods of prodigious length, the consent of opinion, the overwhelming inference from all the provinces of natural science, is in favour of an ultimate starting point, a “beginning,” and of the operation at that “beginning” of an intelligent will,—an individual and omnipotent Creator.

At the same time, we must observe that it was not the purpose of Moses, and perhaps it was not in his power, to describe Creation with scientific accuracy.\* Genesis, like

\* A recent ingenious writer considers the First Chapter of Genesis to be an Apocalypse of Creation seen by Adam, as the Apocalypse of the new heavens and earth was seen by John. I am not prepared to allow this, in the entire absence of the formula, “I looked, I saw,” so often found in the Book of Revelation; nor, if we admit the First Chapter to be a vision, does there seem to be good reason for limiting the Apocalypse to the Creation, and not extending the same theory to the account of the Fall, and to later accounts also, since there is observed throughout the same style of simple narrative. I quite concur, however, in the following observations of the writer to whom I allude :—

“They who require or expect in Genesis a treatise on Geology, will be equally disappointed with those who look for a book of History in the Revelation of St. John. . . . Future discovery must not be anticipated any more than future history. . . . The seven days of Creation are neither



the rest of the Bible, has a moral and spiritual aim only, and therefore, what it communicates regarding Creation, equally with other subjects, is addressed, less to the speculative understanding than to the conscience and spiritual part of man. Accordingly, after the first sentence, the description at once narrows. We are told of a chaotic condition of the earth, which some have imagined to have ensued on the fall of angels, previously living on its surface. We are not, however, informed of any creation of angels or other races of intelligent creatures before, above, or besides ourselves. The object is to show the preparation made for man, and the place assigned to man on this earth and under heaven. So, the ordering of the earth, and sea, and sky, in six periods, each marked by an evening and a morning, or fading and growing light, is drawn out in a brief sketch, and this lies on the first page of the Bible,—a sore puzzle to those who fancy that they are bound to read it as a complete Divine account of the whole creation. It was never intended to be so taken. It is simply a sketch of God's arrangement of a dwelling-place for man—in illustration of which we may notice the importance assigned to the moon above the stars. It is named one of the "two great lights," solely because of its superior usefulness to man. In fact, the main interest of

seven literal days of twenty-four hours each, nor yet seven definite historical periods, the events of which are literally recorded, but as the seven seals, trumpets, and vials of St. John's Revelation represented the history of the future by a typical representation of each of its grand divisions, *without any of them* being chronologically defined, so do the seven days of the Mosaic cosmogony represent, in a dramatic and typical form, the successive changes which took place at creation, each grand feature being boldly sketched out in one scenic representation *characteristic* of that particular epoch."—*Princpal Man Unwield*, pp. 40-44.

the first chapter, after the first verse, is intended to rest on its conclusion, the

II. ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN RACE AT PRESENT INHABITING THE EARTH.—The world teemed with life at God's word; then He formed man out of the dust, and breathed into him. Scripture is pledged to the doctrine, that man is no adaptation, improvement, or development of a previously existing creature, but wholly a new creature, while containing in his structure the best points of prior and inferior organizations. We are not concerned here with the question of a pre-Adamite race of men. If it can be proved that such beings lived, and strove with wild beasts before Adam and Eve existed, let it be proved. The interest of the Bible, and of all *religious* history, revolves round the Adamic race, formed for the subjugation of the earth, gifted with intellect, conscience, and dignity, and beginning their career in happy communion with Jehovah-God.

III. BEGINNING OF MARRIAGE.—In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, we read of the duality of the race from its origin: "male and female created He them." The sexual distinction already established throughout the animal and vegetable kingdoms was continued in the lordly human race. In the second chapter the formation of woman is more fully described, with her marriage to "the man" by the Lord Himself. Henceforth, marriage is honourable in all. It may not be broken capriciously, for whatever may have occurred in Israel or any other nation in regard to divorce at the pleasure of the husband, "from

the beginning it was not so." Originally, marriage is the union of one man and one woman, whom God has joined together, so that they are no more twain, but one. This is the Divine law of marriage for ever—the nuptial oneness being dissolved by death only, or in exceptional cases by such divorce as the word of Jesus Christ expressly allows.

III

IV. ENTRANCE OF SIN, AND DEATH BY SIN.—There is no question that sin is in the world, and has been in it as long as human memory extends. Because of this there is much misery; there is moral and spiritual death by sin. Had this a beginning? and if so, how did it originate? Genesis gives the answer, and the New Testament repeats it,—“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” Whether we regard the account of the Garden, the trees, the beautiful fruit, and the speaking serpent, as plain history, or as Eastern allegory, this at all events is the account of the entrance of sin, to which the Bible is pledged. It came into the world by the will of man contravening the known will of God—not by the gradual decline of a race of men from primitive simplicity and purity, but “by one man’s disobedience,” the fall from his integrity of the head and parent of our race. Thereafter, sin, having obtained an entrance into the world, continued and spread by a law of descent, and a power of contagion. And judgment followed; death by sin;—and “death has passed on all, for all have sinned.”

The Book of Genesis, having thus explained the existence of sin on the earth, proceeds to tell of its ravages—murder in the first family—violence overspreading the

Old World—a generation of the ungodly swept away by the deluge—sin in Noah's family immediately after the flood—sin in Sodom and Gomorrah—sin in the families of the patriarchs—sin in Canaan, and sin in Egypt—sin in the dwellers in cities, and sin in the dwellers in tents. To multiply gods, to make idols, to dishonour parents, to kill, to commit adultery, to steal, to lie, to covet—the beginnings of all these sins are found written in Genesis.

IV

V. ORIGIN OF SACRIFICE.—It is not affirmed in this book that God ordained the offering of sacrifice to Himself, but it is made evident that acceptable worshippers, such as Abel, Noah, and Abraham, followed some intimation of the Divine will, and made their oblations—not according to mere human impulses or instincts, but in faith and in the obedience of faith. There is every probability, that the animals with whose skins Adam and Eve were first clothed, had been slain in sacrifice. They could not have been killed for food, as flesh was not eaten till after the flood. Abel's sacrifice is affirmed in the New Testament to have been offered "in faith." With sacrifice Noah took possession of a New World; with sacrifice at Shechem, Abraham entered on the Land of Promise. The heathen soon debased the ordinance of sacrifice to cruel and superstitious rites, but from the beginning its idea was the solemn devotement of life to God, pouring out the soul unto death, in type of the Slain "Lamb of God Which taketh away the sin of the world."

VI. BEGINNING OF COVENANT PROMISES.—We refer, not to the ordinance delivered to Adam, which divines have

called a Covenant of Life, or Covenant of Works, but to the Covenants, expressly so termed, which were made with Noah and with Abraham.

Each of these was a covenant in the sense of an engagement, which God, of His mere grace, made, and permitted to be pleaded and urged as a claim upon himself. Each was a covenant by sacrifice, and each had a sign in the sky—the one the rainbow, the other the countless stars. Each had a promise; the one, of the preservation of the world from a recurrence of the deluge, the other of a blessing on all nations of the world, in Abraham's seed, which is Christ.

*XI*  
VII. BEGINNING OF NATIONS AND TONGUES.—The tenth chapter of this book details the early divisions and genealogies, proceeding from the three branches of Noah's family; and although some may pass it by as a dry catalogue of names, it is really a record of immense value to the ethnologist and to every student of antiquity. A great living authority has called it "a chapter of wonderful grasp, and still more wonderful accuracy—a sketch of the nations of the earth, their ethnic affinities, and to some extent their geographical position and boundaries. The *Toldoth Beni Noah* has extorted the admiration of modern ethnologists, who continually find in it anticipations of their greatest discoveries."\*

*XII*  
VIII. ORIGIN OF THE HEBREW RACE.—Idolatry had begun in the East; tribes and nations fell under the power of vain superstitions. It pleased God to institute a new dispensation of religion, in direct opposition to Polytheistic

\* Rawlinson's Bampton Lectures, lect. ii.

heathenism. It began in the call of Abram. Heathenism had been allowed to take possession of the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris, of the realm of Egypt, and the regions and islands over which the human race rapidly spread. But God set His eye and His heart on the land of Canaan, —designed it for a Holy Land, and called Abraham to occupy it as His friend, and the ancestor of a people through whom salvation should come to the world, and of whom should be born the Saviour of mankind.

The latter and larger part of Genesis is occupied with biographical sketches of the Hebrew patriarchs.

Abraham was the man of faith, and friend of God. His son, by Hagar the bondwoman, was Ishmael, a wild man, for faith can have by the spirit of bondage nothing but restlessness and confusion. His son, by Sarah the free-woman, was Isaac, the heir of promise. The issue of faith and liberty is peace.

Isaac fills up calmly and unobtrusively the interval between Abraham's grand career and the complicated agitated history of Jacob. Yet he too had his trials of faith, like Abraham his father, in regard to an heir of promise. First he had to wait long for the birth of a child to continue his line, and then he was baffled in his preference for his elder son by the Divine election of the younger to be the covenant heir.

Jacob is at first a very faulty character, full of craft and selfishness; but by chastisements and visions of heavenly things he was corrected, and at last proved to be an Israel, a Prince with God. His early sins, however, brought late sorrows upon him. As he had lied to his father Isaac, so



his children lied to him in his old age, and bowed his hoary head under a causeless grief.

Joseph had trial of envy, betrayal, false accusation, unjust imprisonment, sudden exaltation, and almost imperial power. With the romantic history of this hero, saint, and signal type of Christ, the grand Book of Genesis ends.

Search this Scripture, for it testifies of Christ.

1. By and for Christ were all things created and made.
2. The last Adam is Christ.
3. Adam and Eve in marriage present Christ and the Church.
4. Sin is put away, and righteousness brought in by one man—Christ.
5. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.
6. Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant.
7. Men shall be blessed in Christ, and all nations shall call him blessed.
8. Christ is the Consolation and the King of Israel.

Our Lord is also variously set forth in typical men,—in Adam, Abel, Noah, Melchizedec, Isaac, and Joseph. He is the best fulfilment of the oracle concerning the victorious seed of the woman, and to Him belongs, in the highest sense, the heirship according to promise. As we read Genesis, let us learn Christ, and thank God that the Scripture which opens our wound of sin, points us also to our remedy in Jesus.



## EXODUS.

THE name of the second book, like that of the first, is taken from the Greek version,—the principal event related being the exodus, or out-going of Israel from Egypt.

This book is evidently connected by its opening word “Now,” with the book which goes before, and is from the same pen. Yet it is unlike Genesis. It covers a far shorter period of time; and, whereas Genesis is at first a book of universal history, and thereafter of minute biographical sketches, Exodus is throughout the book of a chosen nation. The only biographical sketch it contains is that of the national Leader, and the events of his life are dwelt upon only in so far as they affected the fortunes of Israel.

As Genesis is the book of roots and beginnings, so Exodus is that of redemption, and the law given to the redeemed. Or, it may be arranged and read thus: Israel in Egypt, 12 chapters; Israel going from Egypt to Sinai, 6 chapters; Israel at Sinai, 22 chapters—40 chapters in all.

I. ISRAEL IN EGYPT.—At the end of Genesis, the house of Jacob was a large and prosperous family, in high favour with the Egyptian government, and occupying the fertile

district of Goshen. At the beginning of Exodus, the family had become a numerous people, and their increase excited the fears of the court, and the jealousy of the native Egyptians. The stern Pharaoh, who filled the throne, reduced them to bondage, and compelled them to construct vast public works, an occupation most uncongenial to a pastoral race. Task-masters were set over them, who spared not the bastinado. So the affliction of Israel became very grievous. Egypt was made bitter to them, as a house of bondage, and their male children were doomed to death by the Egyptians, in order to diminish and ultimately exterminate the Hebrew race.

The nation seems to have produced no man of mark after Joseph for a period of seventy years. There are such blank periods, barren of greatness, in the history of every people; and more than one nation has had to be brought into terrible emergency before it could produce a real hero. Thus, while Israel prospered in Goshen, no great man arose, but when the iron entered into their souls, Moses was born,—a fair child, a wise and gallant youth, a man of lofty strain, gifted with the faculty of command, and an aptitude for the conduct of arduous enterprises;—but more, and better still, a chosen vessel of Jehovah, a man of faith and works, of patience and energy, fit to be received into near intimacy and sublime converse with God.

It was so ordered by Providence, that this destined Deliverer should have a most complete training for his work. In early life he enjoyed the highest education the age could afford; military discipline, too, and all princely advantages. Thereafter he passed many years in the very deserts through which he had subsequently to lead the

twelve tribes, thus strengthening his soul in meditation and solitude, while forming a personal acquaintance with the hills, valleys, practicable routes, and nomad tribes of the Arabian wilderness.

When Moses was ripe for the great task of his life, the people of Israel were in yet more intolerable bondage than at the time of his birth. The Pharaoh, at whose court he was educated, had died, but his successor was still more harsh and arbitrary. "And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God, by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them."

The prayer of the oppressed in Egypt began to be answered in Midian. The Lord called, and commissioned Moses to overcome the haughty Pharaoh. He gave not only "redemption to his folk," but a Redeemer, who was not ashamed to call them brethren, who identified himself with them, descended into their affliction, and delivered them out of it, by judgment and mercy. Moses brought judgment to the gods and Pharaoh of Egypt, mercy to the poor and oppressed, "whose cry had come up unto God."

Successive chapters narrate the wonderful controversy between the unarmed Moses and his brother Aaron on the one side, and on the other the Pharaoh who was feared as the mightiest monarch in the world, and even worshipped as a god. Stroke upon stroke displayed the might of Jehovah, the God of Moses and of Israel, over the Pharaoh

and the gods of Egypt, with all their magicians and priests. Every blow of judgment had a direction against the superstitions of the land. It was the sacred Nile that was turned to blood. It was a nation that worshipped animal forms,—even frogs and beetles, as well as cattle,—that was plagued with frogs, and swarms of vermin, and saw their fields desolated by locusts, and their cattle perishing by murrain and hail-storms. It was the people who worshipped the sun-god, and called their monarch *Pharaoh* (the child of the sun), that sat in darkness for three days.

The decisive blow was that of death, not sparing the first-born of Pharaoh himself—the man who had wielded the absolute power of death—or of his people, who had concurred in his treatment of Israel, or even of the beasts, in order that shame might be poured on the beast-worship of Egypt.

At last the deliverance was accomplished, and Israel went free, redeemed from the plague of death, by the blood of the lamb of passover, and redeemed from the dominion of Pharaoh and his task-masters, by the power of God, whose rod Moses carried as a weapon mightier far than sword or spear.

All this is surely full of spiritual suggestion for our profit. They whose consciences are alive to the true nature of the service of sin, know the house of bondage, and the brick-kilns, and the cruel task-masters. They who are acquainted with the love and power of Christ, know that He has borne reproach, and not merely risked, but suffered death to deliver us. By His precious blood are our lives redeemed, and by His rod of strength are our

enemies subdued. If the Son make us free, then are we free indeed.

II. ISRAEL GOING FROM EGYPT TO SINAI.—From the land of bondage the tribes went out in orderly array. Never was seen such an emancipation of slaves in a night, or a simultaneous emigration on so large a scale.

Another judgment marked the exodus. Pharaoh pursued with an army which trusted in chariots and horses; Moses trusted in Jehovah alone. So the pursuit issued in the utter destruction of Pharaoh and his host, while Israel, “baptized unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea,” emerged on the shore of safety, and sung and prayed before the Lord, who triumphed gloriously. All the better they sang that they had sighed before, and the Lord had turned their mourning into dancing, and girded them with gladness.

Thenceforward Israel was reckoned a people separated from the world, God’s chosen witnesses, His first-born of nations, favoured with special guidance and provision. Bread was given to them, and water was sure. For their need the very heavens rained down manna by their tents, and a fountain burst from the flinty rock. When the hardy sons of Amalek assailed them, the prayer of Moses brought victory to the sword and spear of Joshua, and of Israel. The way prescribed to them was such as became a redeemed people,—a way of faith and new obedience, marked, alas! very early by outbreaks of a murmuring spirit on the part of the tribes, but full of the grace of God, Who, having delivered, then sustains and guides, the people of His choice.

All this, too, is rich in spiritual suggestion for us. They who are now the people of God, are not only rescued from bondage, but are baptized into Christ, and, being made partakers of His resurrection, sing to the Lord a new song, and then set out on a new career. That career must be in separation from the world, and lowly dependence on Christ for bread and water of life, and for victory over those that war against their souls. It is a walk by faith, not sight, and though marred by murmuring and folly on the part of the pilgrims, it is guarded day and night by the power of God, and reveals the riches of His long-suffering grace. This analogy has become so familiar to every devout mind, that, almost unconscious of any figure of speech, Christians are ready to sing,—

“From Egypt lately come,  
Where death and darkness reign,  
We seek our new, our better home,  
Where we our rest shall gain.”

III. ISRAEL AT SINAI.—Three months were consumed on the march to the Wilderness of Sinai. There the people lay encamped for nearly a year, receiving the law, and being organised as a sacred host around the tabernacle of their God.

Jehovah, the Divine Redeemer of Israel, came down among them as their King. He chose the Mount Sinai in Arabia as His throne, or seat of authority, and thence, amidst clouds and darkness and lightning flashes that lit up the rugged rocks, He uttered His Holy Law. It was in ten words, or commandments, and these the Lord was afterwards pleased to engrave on slabs of stone, and to deliver to Moses in the mount. Thus was redeemed



Israel brought under a distinct code of duty and a theocratic government. Let us observe, however, that theocracy never meant a government by priests. God established His government over Israel in the hands of Moses and the elders, while, as yet, there were no priests in existence. When they were appointed, they were not entrusted as such with any functions of government—functions, indeed, for which priests have in all times and all countries shown themselves peculiarly unfit.

While the Israelites were slaves, they were compelled to serve the will of Pharaoh. When they were free, they were bound to do the will of Jehovah. They could not serve two masters. The yoke of the heathen they cast off, and took upon them the yoke of Jehovah, holy, just, and good. Too true it is that they broke God's law, and even at the foot of the sacred mount, in the absence of Moses, relapsed into the Egyptian worship of the ox. But the law of the Lord changed not, and the obligation to obedience was not modified. Through their history it was taught for all time to come that a redeemed people are bound to be a holy people, and that the God of their salvation requires it of them, that they obey His voice indeed, and keep His covenant.

At the same time, the standing of a redeemed people was shown even at Mount Sinai to be not of legal merit, but of grace. When the tribes of Israel fell back in fear at the foot of the Mount, Moses drew near in their behalf as a mediator. When they sinned and provoked the Lord to wrath, Moses pleaded for them—significant type of the Mediator of the new covenant, who ever lives to make intercession for us.

The legislation from Sinai included civil as well as religious ordinances, but all connected, commingled, and interlaced together, because the God of Israel was also their King, and the King of Israel was their God. To the laws and ordinances were added minute prescriptions for the erection of the House of God, or rather Sacred Tent, with His ark and mercy-seat, and altars and priesthood. Directions delivered to Moses in regard to these, and an account of the faithful execution of the Divine commands, occupy the latter part of Exodus.

Among the heathen, every hill and grove had its shrine to one or other of many gods, and its own solemnities of worship. The God of Israel was One, and so long as the times of Israel continued would have for His worship but one earthly centre. In obedience to His command, a sacred tent or tabernacle was made of materials abundantly provided by a willing people, carefully fashioned according to Divine direction, and consecrated to be the special dwelling-place of Jehovah, and His meeting-place with man. In front of it stood the altar of burnt-offering, and the laver for ablution—showing that he who comes to God must come by water and by blood. In its first chamber were the lamp-stand, the table of shew-bread, and the altar of incense, to express illumination, obedience, and prayer on the part of those who would dwell with God. In its second chamber, behind the veil, were the ark of testimony containing the law, and the mercy-seat thereon—*i.e.*, God's throne of grace resting on His righteousness, and mercy rejoicing over judgment. Figures of cherubim were carved as visible attendants of the invisible God—those living creatures, symbols of all



the forces of created life, being always placed near the throne of the Living God. The tabernacle seems to have had no floor but the naked ground—a singular contrast to its embroidered curtains and golden vessels. It pleased the Lord to take the dust of the earth for the pavement of an “earthly sanctuary.”

Then the priesthood was appointed, with careful directions for the clothing and consecration of those who should fill that office. The sons of Aaron were dressed in fine linen, clean and white—the colour of purity and joy. The high priest himself wore an ephod of blue, the colour of obedience, with shoulder ornaments of onyx stone, on which were engraved the names of the tribes, and a breastplate containing the oracle of Urim and Thummim, and bearing twelve precious stones with the names of the twelve tribes upon them, so that the redeemed people were “as a seal upon his heart, and as a seal upon his arm.” The mitre or turban on his head bore a motto on a golden plate which covered the forehead—“Holiness to Jehovah.” The priests were bathed in water before they put on the holy and beautiful garments, and then anointed with the same “holy oil” with which the tabernacle and its vessels were consecrated—an aromatic ointment made up after a Divine prescription, and strictly reserved for sacred use—a sign of the holy anointing of Christ and the Church by the Holy Ghost.

The tablets of the Decalogue had been broken by Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai, in his grief and horror at the sight of Israel worshipping the golden Ox. The Lord condescended to renew them, and wrote His law a second time on “tables of stone.” His anger had been turned

away ; the glory of His goodness had been shown ; and the intercession of Moses for Israel had been accepted. So He gave the law without flashes of fire or cloudy tempests into the mediator's hand. And when the mediator Moses brought the law to Israel, his face was radiant with the glory of the Lord.

At the end of the Book of Exodus, we see the whole fabric of the Mosaic polity complete, the symbol of God's presence resting by day and night on the tabernacle in the midst of the pilgrim host. Truly an inestimable Book, setting forth for all time coming the essential truths of redemption, separation to God, the way of the redeemed, the holy law delivered to them, their education and discipline, and the provision made for their approach to God, and God's dwelling among them. Emphatically, too, may we affirm, that this scripture is to be searched, because it testifies of Christ.

Take the first period, and it is surely Christ that we see in the child born and plotted against in his infancy, but rescued from the death in which other Hebrew children were involved ; Christ in the man who endured affliction for His brethren, and delivered them with an outstretched arm ; and Christ in the Lamb slain to redeem a people from death—" Christ our passover sacrificed for us."

Take the second period, and the leader who guides his people through a baptism into death, into the power of resurrection, is, under a figure, Christ. The bread from heaven is Christ ; the rock from which the water gushed is Christ ; and the captain who drove back the Amalekites is Christ, the captain of our salvation.

Take the third period, and learn that we are under law

to Christ; we have a Mediator in Christ, we have our High Priest in Christ, and our way into the Holiest open through the rent veil, *i.e.*, His flesh. If we are Christ's, we too are pilgrims through a land of drought; and the history of Israel in Exodus, while it stirs within us great searchings of heart, gives us at the same time sweet consolation in Christ. "O give thanks unto the Lord who brought out Israel from Egypt with a strong hand and a stretched-out arm, to Him who led His people through the wilderness, for His mercy endureth for ever."

## LEVITICUS.

IN Hebrew, this book has no other title than its first word, *Vayikra* (and he called). In Rabbinical writings, it is termed "the law of the priests," and "the law-book of the offerings." The Seventy named it *Leviticus*, because it treats of the service conducted by the priests and others of the tribe of Levi. It is found to consist almost entirely of the direct words of Jehovah, and on this account is entitled to peculiar attention and respect. Its object is to teach the way of acceptable worship, and the hallowing of accepted worshippers for fellowship with the Holy One of Israel. Although it is full of details respecting a ceremonial which is no more of force or obligation, yet it is by no means a superseded or antiquated book. On the contrary, there is hardly a book of the Bible more deeply fraught with instruction and comfort to the Christian mind. When it is read in the light of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Leviticus unfolds to us the most vital truths regarding the way of access to God, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, fellowship, and consecration.

When the Lord gave the law, as recorded in Exodus, He was in the Mount Sinai; but when He issued the ordinances of service written in this book, He did so "out of

the tabernacle of the congregation," beneath the dreadful mount. We hear, in Leviticus, not the Lawgiver speaking in awful tones, or writing on tablets of stone, but the Portion of Israel, dwelling in the midst of His people, and teaching them how they might draw near to His presence and abide in communion with Him.

The book easily arranges itself in two parts,—the first comprising 16 chapters, treating of access to God; the second, of 11 chapters, of the hallowing of Israel, in order to live and walk as His people. We wish, however, to go a little more into detail, and point out five chief matters.

I. SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS.—God must be worshipped according to His own mind,—not ours. He has taught us that worship rendered to Him by sinful men cannot be acceptable unless it is based on atoning sacrifice, and nowhere have we such rich and ample teaching of the doctrine of sacrifice as in the seven chapters with which Leviticus opens, and the 16th chapter of the same book.

The sacrifices are of five kinds, described in the following order:—The Burnt-Offering, The Bread-Offering, The Peace-Offering, The Sin-Offering, and The Trespass-Offering. Such is the divine order of thought, but the human is exactly the reverse. An Israelite, with a guilty conscience, and a remembrance of sins, had practically to begin at the end of the series; and we ourselves, in looking to the one sacrifice of Christ, have also to begin at that view of it which is at the end of this series—the end next us. We must begin at the trespass-offering and end with the whole burnt-offering,—begin with the remission of trespasses and sins, and advance to the offering of an entire

consecration—*i.e.*, the whole burnt-offering on the altar of Jehovah. All the sacrifices testify of Christ, and set forth to us the various meanings, aspects, and uses of His one perfect offering. Let us try to indicate this in a few words.

1. The Burnt-Offering was the type of Christ offering Himself without spot to God. The Israelite who brought this offering did so "of his own voluntary will." It was the sign of his entire and cordial devotion to God. The creature offered was required to be a male, without blemish; then the offerer himself killed it before the Lord, *i.e.*, poured out in a figure his own life, for the will is in the life, and the life is in the blood. Some of the blood was by the priest sprinkled about upon the altar, and then the whole carcase, washed and cut in pieces, was burnt on the altar, in the sacred court.

Christ is the offerer "of His own voluntary will," for no man took His life from Him, but He laid it down of Himself. Christ is the offering too—without blemish, without spot. And Christ is the Priest, who officiates in presenting the burnt-offering of Himself unto God, for a sweet-smelling savour. Herein the people of Christ are to follow Him. They can render no sin-offerings, but they do lay burnt-offerings on the altar whenever they yield themselves in undinching devotion to God, and in the flame of fire, in the zeal that is kindled at the altar by the Eternal Spirit, offer themselves without spot to God, saying in their Master's words, "Father, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

2. The Bread or Food-Offering was not for expiation, and so was without blood. It was not presented by itself, but followed burnt-offerings or peace-offerings. It repre-



sents the laying of the pure humanity of Christ, and then the renewed humanity of Christians, on the altar of God in obedience, for this is the very food of God, in which His soul delights, and this the joy of those who stand in His courts, and surround His throne.

3. The Peace-Offering expressed the grounds of friendship, harmony, and communion with God. It began like the burnt-offering, with imposition of hands on the head of a victim, and infliction of death. But then began the difference. The burnt-offering was entirely consumed by fire; the peace-offering was divided among Jehovah, the priest who officiated, and the Israelite who brought it. There was a feast after, and upon, the sacrifice—a feast of friendship in the household of God. Surely Christ is here too, giving us peace by the blood of His cross—Himself as crucified and slain, the basis of all friendly intercourse between God and man.

4. The Sin-Offering. This was atonement proper, and is fulfilled in Jesus, who knew no sin, made sin for us—Jesus who did no sin, His own Self bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. The blood of the sin-offering was the type of the blood of Christ, which cleanses us from all sin; and the body of the sin-offering, being burnt without the camp, was the type of the body of Christ suffering for us without the gate.

5. The Trespass-Offering adds the ideas of redemption and remedy. Our trespasses are our debts, *i.e.*, definite acts of wrong or evil, which may be estimated. In the case of trespasses against God, sacrifice was required first, then reparation. In the case of trespasses against men, (which are also counted as against the Lord, chap. vi. 1), restitu-

tion was required first, then sacrifice. Evidently we are to see in the trespass-offering, redemption and ransom by the precious blood of Christ.

Thus He is all. The Burnt-Offering is His entire dedication, the Meat-Offering His living service, the Peace-offering His becoming our Peace and the Feast of our affections with God, the Sin-Offering His propitiation for our sins, and the Trespass-Offering His discharging our debt, repairing our wrong, and redeeming our lives to God.

The sixteenth chapter is one of great weight and solemnity. It describes the Day of Atonement, and, by means of a double sacrifice, expresses the two blessings of propitiation for sin, and removal of sin. On that day only in all the year, the high priest entered the most holy place.

These were shadows of heavenly things. We have under the Gospel the heavenly things themselves,—not a continual remembrance of sins, but a putting-away of sins for ever, the way into the holiest made manifest to the Church, and our great High Priest over the house of God, the continual encouragement to draw near.

All Israel stood without, while Aaron was in the holiest. Now that our great High Priest is in the holiest of all, Israel, alas! stands without, unbelieving until this day. There is a vail upon their hearts; but when the High Priest comes out, they will see Him and rejoice.

II. CONSECRATION AND INVESTITURE OF PRIESTS.—Aaron and his sons were bathed in water, anointed with oil, attired in significant garments of office, and installed in their places, as the priests of the priestly nation. We have one High Priest who is passed into the heavens, sanctified



for our sakes, High Priest of the priestly people, which is the Church. Consider Moses and Aaron. Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession—Christ Jesus, who is faithful to Him who appointed Him.

Scarcely had the priests been consecrated in Israel, before there was an exposure of the perversity of man, which mars and stains the brightest prospects. Presumption appeared in the family of Aaron, and judgment began at the tabernacle of God. Two sons of the high priest entered the sanctuary in self-confidence, and offered incense, with “strange” or unhallowed fire, as though independent of the altar whereon the fire of God burned. Thus they approached God after the device of their own hearts, neglecting or despising the ordinances of sacrifice. Therefore sudden death fell on them, as afterwards on Uzzah the Levite, and later still, Ananias and Sapphira, to check at once, by solemn warnings, the sin of presumption and self-will.

III. DISCERNMENT BETWEEN THINGS HOLY AND PROFANE, AND THE JUDGMENT OF DEFILEMENTS. — Holiness follows on acceptance by sacrifice, and priesthood is not only for prayer and service, but in order to the discrimination of the pure from the impure.

In accordance with the character of a dispensation which put moral and spiritual ideas into visible and material forms, the distinction between the clean and the unclean was marked in the creatures used for food as well as for sacrifice. All the living creatures around were made to suggest moral conceptions to an Israelite, and it was arranged that the very question, “What to eat, and

what to drink?" should act as a bit and bridle on his will.

Then, after directions for purifying, which we find referred to in the Gospel, and obeyed by the blessed Virgin Mary, we have minute details regarding health and cleanliness. Leprosy had doubtless been engendered in Egypt during the degradation of the bondage, and adhered to the Israelites still. It is referred to as affecting (1) a human body, (2) human raiment, (3) human dwellings. Most explicit directions are given for its detection and Divine cure. So does the vileness of sin work in the inner man, then affect the garments, or usages of the outer man also; nay, further, it taints the house and defiles the domestic and social relations of life. For this there is no cure but that which the Son of God applies—"Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make us clean."

IV. LAWS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS OF LIFE.—God would always have it understood that to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken better than the fat of rams. He required His redeemed and worshipping people to be holy; for He, their God, was holy. He could not walk with them, nor they with Him, but in the light of truth and purity.

In the part of the book which we have now reached, there are exhortations and requirements which Christians need as much as Israelites to read and observe. They relate to probity, veracity, justice between man and man, avoidance of tale-bearing, impartiality in judgment, honesty in dealings, respect of aged persons, neighbourly and brotherly kindness, courtesy to all. Some call this "mere"

morality, or "cold" morality, but there is no need that it should be "mere" or "cold;" let it accompany faith, and let it be warmed by love, and you have a Christian morality that pervades all life, and ennobles character, and commends the Gospel we profess to the consciences of all men in the sight of God.

V. FEASTS, OR HOLY CONVOCATIONS.—Under the Mosaic economy, men were required to observe days, and months, and years, for God Himself marked the times and seasons with a view to religious commemoration, instruction, and edification. There were six feasts of days and months, two feasts of years,—eight in all.

1. *The Sabbath*.—This weekly rest held a chief place as a sign between Jehovah and Israel. It entered also into the great annual festivals, each of them being made to contain a Sabbath of special solemnity. So also there must enter into all Christian feasts or joys Sabbatism,—resting in the Lord, and waiting patiently for Him.

2. *The Passover, or Feast of Unleavened Bread*.—Being the commemorative feast of redemption, this was placed first of the annual convocations, because all the joy in the Lord possessed by the Hebrews sprung from their redemption, and belonged to them as a people redeemed.

3. *The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost*.—This was the harvest-home, on which two loaves of fine flour, ground from the new corn, and baked as common bread, were waved before the Lord. To Him was thus ascribed the whole staff of bread in the families of the nation; and burnt-offerings, peace-offerings, and sin-offerings, were at the same time presented, in acknowledgment of the un-

worthiness of the people to reap any good at the hand of the Lord, and in propitiation of His favour and forgiveness.

4. *The Feast of Trumpets.*—The months in Israel were lunar, and the new moons were days of special mark; but it was reserved for the new moon, or first day of the seventh month, as the chief sacred month of the year, to be elevated to the rank of a feast to the Lord. On every new moon, trumpets were blown. On the seventh, they appear to have been sounded with unusual force and emphasis, calling to mind the blast of a trumpet and the voice of words on Mount Sinai, arresting the ear of all Israel as by a Divine summons, and stirring up every soul to attend to the two solemnities which made the seventh month the most momentous period of the Jewish year.

5. *The Day of Atonement.*—This was always the tenth day of the seventh month. It was not, however, a festal occasion, but a day in which the children of Israel “should afflict their souls.” All their sins came up in remembrance, and it became them to put aside all levity of spirit, and with fasting, and sorrow, and searchings of heart, to spend those hours in which the high priest performed in their behalf the highest rites of typical atonement.

6. *Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths.*—Five days after the great Sabbath of atonement this festival began, and it lasted for eight days. It is sometimes called the feast of in-gathering, because it took place after the vintage, when the round of the year’s husbandry was complete. Israel tented out for a week in booths made of leafy branches, or in structures of some light, perishable material, in memory of their sojourn in the wilderness. This feast was thus a

yearly renewal of their youth, a lively recollection of the time of their espousals to Jehovah.

Such were the six feasts of days and months. Remember the order of the three which were chief,—Passover, Pentecost, Palm-branches and Booths. These concern us also. Christ at the Passover; the Spirit at Pentecost; the Feast before the throne, kept by the redeemed of all nations with palm branches, making booths, not with Peter, and James, and John only, or even with Moses and Elias, but with the Lamb on the heavenly mount.

7. *The Sabbatic Year.*—When Israel should get possession of Canaan, they were to leave the land untilled every seventh year. It was a Sabbath of the land, its rest unto Jehovah. This was for the sake of the land itself, to preserve its fertility, the Israelites being only tenants of the soil under God, the Supreme Proprietor. This was also for the good of Israel, to check covetousness, to limit domestic bondage, and to remind the people that they were only God's tenants-at-will, dependent on His good pleasure. This law was not well kept, and its non-observance is given as one of the reasons for Israel's subsequent captivity in Babylon: "To fulfil the word of the Lord, by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate, she kept sabbath to fulfil three-score and ten years."\*

8. *The Jubilee (Jobel).*—This was the fiftieth year, as Pentecost was the fiftieth day. At the close of the day of atonement, on which all Israel afflicted their souls, the trumpet was to sound through all the land, the oil of joy was given for mourning, and the garment of praise for the

\* 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21.

spirit of heaviness. Sweeter than ever sounded a cathedral bell, or cry of the muezzin from a minaret, fell on the ears of the Israelites the notes of jubilee trumpets. Most welcome of all to the poor of the land, for redemption was drawing nigh. The law of jubilee maintained the original distribution of the land of Canaan, restored forfeited inheritances, and emancipated captives and slaves. The whole tendency of the admirable legislation in regard to the land of Israel was to secure a diffusion of property and personal liberty among the masses of the people, and so to promote contentment and self-respect, under the all-protecting shadow of Jehovah's wings.

This festival, too, is full of Christ. The Gospel is now the joyful sound. Christ Himself blew the first notes of the jubilee trumpet, when He proclaimed the kingdom of heaven to be at hand. Apostles and evangelists prolonged the sound through many lands and wondering cities of the East; and now to us is this salvation come. In the name of Christ is preached, as through jubilee trumpets, forgiveness of sins, rest for the weary, liberty to the captives, the acceptable year of the Lord.

With some details regarding vows and tithes, the Book of Leviticus ends,—surely a book to be deeply pondered, as exhibiting much Christian doctrine in an antique drapery, and full of spiritual meat for those who can discern and enjoy the great truths of Gospel salvation and Gospel worship, that underlie the Hebrew ceremonial. We are not come to Mount Sinai, but if we study the ordinances given to those who came to that mount, we may learn what are the better things given to us who are come to Mount Zion. “For Christ is not entered into the holy places

made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; . . . but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”\*

\* Heb. ix, 24-26.



## NUMBERS.

THE fourth book takes its name from the numbering of the people of Israel, twice recorded in its pages. It is, however, far more than a national register. As Leviticus is the book of worship, and separation to God, Numbers is the book of service and pilgrimage. It shows us the way in the wilderness, and the discipline through which pilgrims pass.

The time covered by this book is a little more than thirty-eight years; but the narrative is occupied almost entirely with the beginning and close of the period. Matthew Henry says pithily, "An abstract of much of this book we have in a few words (Ps. xcv. 10), 'Forty years long was I grieved with this generation,' and an application of it to ourselves (Heb. iv. 1), 'Let us fear lest we seem to come short.' Many considerable nations there were now in being that dwelt in cities and fortified towns, of which no notice is taken, no account kept by the sacred history; but very exact records are kept of the affairs of a people that dwelt in tents, and wandered strangely in a wilderness, because they were the children of the covenant. 'For the Lord's portion is His people, Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.'"

The Book of Numbers may be divided into three parts—

Chap. i.-x. 10.—Preparation for leaving the encampment at Sinai.

Chap. x. 11-xxi.—History of the journey from Sinai to the land of Moab, including the murmuring and the long detention in the deserts of Arabia.

Chap. xxii.-xxxiv.—Occurrences in Moab, and preparations for entering and occupying the promised land.

I. FIRST PART.—The tribes of Israel were mustered, instructed, and set in order. The males of twenty years and upwards, were found to be 603,550. If to these, we add the 22,000 Levites of the same age, we cannot compute the Hebrew nation at less than 2,000,000. To such a host had multiplied the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, and their servants and followers, with the addition of Egyptians and others who adhered to Israel in the exodus. If any find it hard to be believed, that two millions of people could be projected into Arabia and live there with flocks and herds for forty years, let them bear in mind that the great peninsula was not at all so waste or barren in ancient times, as it is now. It had dreary places, or lands of drought, where water failed; but there is reason to think, that it also had many towns and far-reaching grassy plains, and supported a large population both of fixed and wandering tribes.\*

The census was followed by organisation of the Lord's host. Four divisions were formed, each consisting of three tribes. Every man was to dwell in his own tribe, and every tribe to know and keep its proper place in the

\* The reader is referred to the recent explorations of Mr. Tristram and Mr. Holland.

division, whether in rest, or on the march. When the host moved, each tribe struck its tents, raised its banner, and fell in at its appointed station. Places were assigned to the sacred ark, and the parts and furniture of the tabernacle, borne by the Levites. The descendants of Joseph, constituting the three tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, formed the division that followed the ark. Hence the prayer in Ps. lxxx. 1, 2, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us." When the tents were pitched, the Lord's Tent was in the midst, and the tribes formed a square—three to the north, three to the south, three to the east, three to the west. The division headed by Judah had for its standard the figure of a lion; that which was headed by Ephraim, the figure of an ox. If the tradition be correct, that Reuben had that of a man, and Dan that of an eagle, we have in this arrangement a remarkable anticipation of the vision of the cherubim in Ezekiel, and yet more clearly of that in the Apocalypse, where the four living creatures in attendance on the throne of God appear as a lion, an ox, a man, and a flying eagle. Moreover, the camp of Israel, arranged and organised as a perfect square, not only shows us, that the Lord numbers and writes up His people, and that He is the Author of order and not confusion in Churches of the saints, but also foreshadows the realisation of the completed Church at the last day—the great city, holy Jerusalem, "which lieth four-square, and the length is as large as the breadth." The gates of the city shall be three to the east, three to the north, three

to the south, and three to the west, and on those gates are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Levites were set apart for service, and were given over to Aaron the high priest as their commander. Let us learn, that the service of all saints is accepted only in union with the high-priestly action of Jesus Christ, and that they are not their own masters, but set apart and given over to Christ, as "the Minister of the Sanctuary and True Tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man."

The organisation being complete, the tribes in their positions, and the Levites at their post, laws were given to keep all within the precincts of the camp clean and holy ground. Strict sanitary regulations were laid down and enforced for the compulsory removal of defilements—an admirable precedent for modern municipal governments, as well as military commanders, to follow. These regulations were fitted to impress upon Israel that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity—that He is not as the vile gods of the heathen, whose rites of service were often shameful orgies, but is a lover of health, and brightness, and purity. On us too is the lesson enforced, that the precious must be separated from the vile—that the wilfully unholy and unclean ought to be excluded from church-fellowship on earth, and will certainly be shut out of the continuing city which is to come, the city of God Almighty and the Lamb.

The sixth chapter contains the law of the Nazarites, recognising devotees, or persons of more than ordinary allegiance and consecration to God. In its ethical and spiritual meaning, this law suggests the need of abstinence

from fleshly lusts and dangerous delights, and the maintenance of full moral energy, and separation from the body of death. The sanction given to the Nazarite vow encourages no vows of celibacy, which were unknown to priest, Levite, or Nazarite, nor arbitrary rules sequestering men or women from the proper duties of family and social life, but a lofty aim in sanctification, and a vow or pledge, under the power of the Holy Ghost, to be in heart and conduct wholly separated to Christ.

So soon as the camp was ordered and cleansed, and the servants of God were in their several places, His seal was put on the whole congregation by the high priest and his sons pronouncing this blessing of Jehovah—"The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."\*

Immediately after this, the organisation which had been established brought tribute to the tabernacle. On twelve successive days the princes of the tribes, in their appointed order, presented gifts. The previous offering mentioned in Exodus was from the people indiscriminately as children of Israel;—this is the tribute from the organisation of Israel, brought in regular proportions, from east, and west, and south, and north;—as hereafter shall be brought the riches of the Gentiles, the glory and honour of nations, to the gates of the Holy Jerusalem.

Then the lamp-stand was lit up in the holy place. God said, Let there be light—light on the table of shew-bread, and on the altar of incense. In the day time, the entrance-curtain being drawn up, the sunlight filled the tabernacle.

\* Num. vi. 24-26.

At even the lamps were lit, that there might never be darkness at all, not even a "dim religious light," but a clear and perpetual shining in the holy place, the sphere of privilege and sacred service. So, if we serve, it must be not in darkness, not even in the vagueness of doubt and gloom, but in the light of scriptural knowledge and spiritual discernment. If we pray, no doubt it is better to pray in the dark than not pray at all. It is something to wail and cry ever so blindly and confusedly after Him, to fall with

Weight of cares  
Upon the world's great altar stairs,  
That slope through darkness up to God.

But not such is the proper worship of Israel or of the Church. It is prayer in the light of Divine knowledge and favour, prayer in the illuminating Spirit to the Father of lights, from whom comes down every good and perfect gift.

There were no lamps in the Holy of Holies. They could not be needed there, for God dwelt there, and He is a Light unto Himself. Where the God of glory shines, there is no need of candle, nor of the light of the sun.

All things now being ready for an advance, the direction of the march was to be given by the cloud of God's presence, and the blast of silver trumpets by the sons of Aaron; the first the signal to the eye, the second the signal to the ear. "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel."\*

\* Num. x. 35, 36.



II. SECOND PART.—“The children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai.” One can imagine a flush of joy on the meek countenance of Moses, as he saw the tribes whom he had brought out of Egypt a confused multitude of slaves, now strike their tents and advance as an organised host, a nation in martial array, almost in triumphal procession, toward their inheritance. The leader persuaded his brother-in-law to accompany the march, for he was a Midianite, and well fitted, by his judgment and personal knowledge of the country, to be to Israel “instead of eyes.” Moses had the divine signal of the moving pillar and cloud of fire, but he would not, on that account, neglect any subordinate aids that were available. An important lesson is here for our guidance, both in private and public life, to ask divine direction, and watch for it, but not to suppose that supernatural intimations will be so given as to supersede the use of the best natural advantages of observation and experience that we possess in ourselves, or can obtain from others.

Alas! the people had scarcely begun their march, before a dark shade fell on their history. After three days’ journey they complained, and, like all people of a low development, they were anxious about nothing but what they should eat and drink. Forgetting the task-masters in Egypt, they sighed for “the fish, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic.” Moses heard this, and went to the Lord, not to the people, for he was incensed and weary at heart with the terrible disappointment which must fall on a great spirit, when he sees how unworthy and ignoble they are for whom he has prayed and toiled.



Other troubles came upon him. Envy began to rankle in the hearts of his own sister and elder brother. A very cruel wound it was, that *they* should speak against him; but Moses bore it quietly, and the Lord vindicated the authority of His servant, because he held his peace.

When the people reached Kadesh Barnea, they proposed to Moses that scouts should be sent forward to explore the land of Canaan. He consented, and twelve spies were chosen and sent—one from each tribe. On their return, after forty days, ten of the scouting party reported in a craven spirit, and exaggerated the difficulties of the invasion. Two only—Caleb and Joshua—lifted a brave protest, and encouraged Israel to advance. The whole congregation were seized with fear, and murmured against God, who, in consequence, sentenced them to wander in the deserts of Arabia for forty years,—a year for each day occupied in spying out the land. Against this sentence they rebelled; and, having been afraid when they should have been bold, they were now bold when they should have been afraid. Disregarding the command of Moses, they attacked the Amalekites, and suffered a severe defeat, learning to their cost, and showing to us, that the bravery of presumption is just as fatal as the cowardice of unbelief.

So the tribes were obliged to turn back from the borders of the land of promise. They could not enter in, because of unbelief. Then followed a melancholy time. A strong conspiracy was formed against Moses and Aaron. The ruling spirit was Korah, a Levite, and apparently a relative of the leader and the high priest. He obtained the support of certain malcontents of the tribe of Reuben. The conspiracy was allowed to attain formidable proportions,

but was then suppressed and punished by a signal judgment of God. The Reubenites, who seemed to aim at earthly power, were swallowed up by an earthquake. Korah, the Levite, and the two hundred and fifty men who stood with him, bearing censers, aimed at spiritual power, and usurped the priests' office; on them fell a fire from the Lord "and consumed them." Let it be a lesson to us to beware of joining ourselves to murmurers and complainers, who, assuming to vindicate Christian liberty, and to assert the holy calling of all Christian men, are impatient of order and office, and stir discontent in the Church of God.

Aaron made intercession for the people who had favoured the conspiracy, returning good for evil. So the plague, which had broken out, was stayed. Immediately after, it pleased God, by the sign of a budding rod, to vindicate the sacred distinction of Levi among the tribes, and to confirm the Levitical priesthood in the house of His servant Aaron.

Few events of the protracted sojourn in Arabia are related. At the 20th chapter we find the tribes re-assembled at Kadesh Barnea. Alas! Moses and Aaron displeased God at the very end of the pilgrimage. It was just after Miriam's death, when we should have expected the illustrious brothers to have been most subdued and quiet in spirit, that they "erred in spirit," and brought on themselves reproof and loss. The people chode with Moses because there was no water. At once he and Aaron became apprehensive lest the new generation, murmuring about water, like their fathers, should incur a second turning-back from this Kadesh Barnea. Agitated by this

fear, Moses did not implicitly rely as before on God's word, but threw into the scene at the rock something like a display of his own power, in order to make a deeper impression on the bystanders. But it was unwise and unworthy of Moses—this loud talking and double striking with the rod. It came of secret misgiving and unbelief, and though the brothers obtained water for Israel, they themselves suffered loss,—they entered not the land of promise.

Aaron died on Mount Hor, being first stripped of his priestly robes, for his high priesthood could not pass into heaven. His son and successor, Eleazar, descended the mount in the official robes, to show that this priesthood continued on earth.

The wanderings of Israel were now nearly ended. There was a tedious journey round the frontier of Idumea, through a sterile region, infested with serpents. When those creatures gathered in unusual numbers, and made an onslaught on the tired and discouraged Israelites, the Lord directed Moses to form a serpent of brass or copper, the hue of which resembled that of the poisonous snakes, and to expose it upon a banner-staff, or pole, so as to be visible to all. Whosoever of the wounded people looked to the brazen serpent was made whole. The incident is full of gospel meaning and consolation,—“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”\*

The Israelites, as they advanced, demanded permission to pass through the territory of the Amorites and the

\* John iii. 14, 15.

land of Bashan. It was refused, and Israel, under the command of Moses, conquered the kings, Sihon and Og, and took possession of their cities and lands, in order to march thence, across the Jordan, into Palestine.

III. THIRD PART.—“And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab, on this side Jordan, by Jericho.”\*

The chief danger now before the people was from Balak and Balaam, and reveals a new depth of Satan. Balaam, indeed, was more to be dreaded than any number of mere giants, like Og, king of Bashan. He was gifted with the temperament of a seer, and had knowledge of the Holy One, but used it for unholy ends, and debased his spirit to the lucrative arts of heathen sorcery. He is the Anti-Moses. Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of King Pharaoh, that he might be true to Israel; Balaam, a man of the same time, and the same lofty genius, but of a base selfishness of heart, went to Moab to seek King Balak's favour and rewards, by cursing those whom God had blessed. By enchantments he prevailed nothing against Israel, and was compelled to bless them in glowing strains. But by vile and crafty counsel, he did succeed in partially ensnaring them. At his suggestion, the daughters of Midian and Moab attracted the men of Israel to the idolatrous and licentious festivals of Baal-Peor. So the chosen nation was defiled, and was smitten of God for the sin. But Israel was soon restored, and, under Phinehas the priest, attacked and almost exterminated the wicked Midianites. “Balaam also, the son of Beor, they

\* Num. xxii. 1.

slew with the sword." No death of the righteous could be for a man that loved the wages of unrighteousness. He had prophesied as one who enjoyed the "vision of the Almighty." Yet he died as a fool dieth, and has left a shameful memory.

Once more, before the invasion of Canaan began, the Lord mustered His people as the heirs of the inheritance, then gave command in regard to the order in which they were to occupy and possess the country, and directions in detail respecting offerings and vows, the division of spoil in war, and the cities of refuge for accidental man-slayers to be appointed in the land.

The order given to Israel was to drive out and dispossess, —not to massacre the Canaanites, but to expel them, and destroy all the signs and materials of their idolatrous worship. The lesson for us is obvious. Called to pilgrimage, we are also appointed to a holy war—sin-vanquishing, flesh-mortifying, idol-excluding,—a protracted war, in which are sieges and marches and many battle-fields, and the enemy is only put out "by little and little."

May the Lord enrol us all in the number of His people, whom no man can number! "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."\*

\* 2 Tim. ii.

## DEUTERONOMY.

THIS book, like those that have gone before, bears the name assigned to it by the Greek translators, meaning the second, *i.e.*, the repeated Law. It proceeds on the contents of the three books immediately preceding, and, rehearsing many of them, urges the generation of Israel, now about to enter on the deferred conquest and occupation of Canaan, to careful, loving, and consistent obedience. It gives prominence to the spiritual principle of the Divine Law, and develops in detail the ecclesiastical, judicial, and political system on which should depend the well-being of Israel, when settled in their own land.

As might be expected, this book contains very little stirring incident, differing therein from Exodus and Numbers; but it is of great value for its ethical and spiritual tone, and is largely quoted by the prophets. The discourses and exhortations of Jeremiah and Ezekiel are formed very much on the model of the addresses and appeals contained in Deuteronomy. On this book also, as we shall see, our Lord Jesus Christ placed peculiar honour.

By far the greater part of the work before us consists of four addresses to Israel, while yet encamped in the plains on the east of the Jordan, with blessings and curses added.

The men whom Moses saw around him were not those whom he had led out of Egypt, but their children; and, before he transferred his authority to his successor, who should lead them into the promised land, the aged Prophet poured out a solemn charge to them, "according unto all that the Lord had given him in commandment."

I. Four chapters are occupied with recapitulation of the history of the tribes, from the time when they left their encampment at Horeb, till they reached Kadesh Barnea, their subsequent wanderings in the desert, and their ultimate arrival at the confines of the promised land, signalled by victory over the king of the Amorites, and the king of Bashan. On this history was founded exhortation, to hearken to the commandments of Jehovah and to do them. It was surely a significant warning against disobedience, that their fathers' wilfulness at Kadesh Barnea had lengthened out what might have been an eleven days' journey into one of forty years.\*

II. Then follow eight chapters in which the Law is rehearsed, with earnest appeals for obedience. This address begins with repetition of the Ten Commandments, and proceeds to impress the principle of acceptable obedience, viz., the love of the Lord God of Israel, with all their "heart and soul and might." The only material difference between the Decalogue, as here given, and as formerly delivered at Sinai, and recorded in Exodus, is that here the reason assigned for the Sabbath is not the rest after creation, but the redemption out of Egypt. This is easily accounted for. It is in keeping with the fact that here the Law is given, not so much as a code for all peoples, as in

\* See Deut. i. 2, 3.



the form of a covenant between Jehovah and the tribes of Israel. With urgent and repeated exhortations to the observance of all Jehovah's commandments, statutes, and judgments, this important section concludes.

It is a high honour put on this part of the book, that out of it the Man Christ Jesus chose the three sayings with which He foiled the three temptations in the wilderness. The first is taken from chap. viii. 3, the second from chap. vi. 16, and the third from chap. vi. 13, and x. 20. Our Lord held His position against the Tempter, not as a divine Being, but as a Man—God's faithful Servant, His Son whom He had called out of Egypt. Israel, the servant of God, His son called out of Egypt, after a separation and sojourn in the wilderness for forty years, received the Book of Deuteronomy. Jesus, having been separated from all men in the wilderness for forty days, took into His mouth, as an Israelite indeed, the words of this very book, and withstood the Tempter in perfect, loving obedience to God.

III. After an earnest warning against a renewal of the provocation and rebellion that had marred their pilgrimage, Moses prescribes to Israel in detail the laws and ordinances they should observe when settled in Canaan. This occupies a long discourse—chaps. viii.—xxvi. All proceeded on the principle, that the people belonged to Jehovah, and were bound to abjure everything at variance with His will and glory. Worship was to have a local centre. All heathenish shrines and images were to be utterly destroyed. Any act of idolatrous worship on the part of an Israelite was to be punished with death; and many other laws are given, expressive of the purity and justice of God, and

fitted to teach His people righteousness of conduct, benevolent consideration for others, kindness to strangers and the poor, and to correct all tendencies to coarseness and brutality of life. This section ends with a solemn declaration of Israel's relationship and duty to Jehovah. They had avouched the Lord to be their God, and He had avouched them to be His peculiar people.

IV. In chapters xxvii.—xxx. we read the blessings and curses severally attached to obedience and disobedience. This discourse was addressed to all Israel, in the most public and impressive manner. Direction was also given, that after they had crossed the river Jordan they should raise pillars on Mount Ebal, and, after sacrifice, inscribe on the stones the words of the Law. Then, while the people stood, six tribes on Mount Gerizim, and six on the opposite Mount Ebal, the blessings of obedience were to be declared from the former, and the curses, or penalties of disobedience, from the latter. Thus was the dread alternative to be in the most impressive manner placed before the whole nation, and the people were to say Amen, acknowledging the Lord's word, and accepting His covenant.

It is significant that the Law was to be inscribed on Mount Ebal only. It indicates that as many as are of the works of the Law are "under the curse," and that the whole legal economy in Israel would, because of the carnality of their minds, work wrath, and involve the absolute need of salvation by a Redeemer. Indeed, when we expect the blessings, at all events, to precede the curses in chapter xxvii., we are appalled to find that the curses go first, twelve in number, the last of them, the sweeping imprecation which is quoted by St. Paul in his Epistle to the

Galatians,—“Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them.”\* When the blessings are mentioned, everlasting life is not among them, but prosperity, peace, national welfare, and power. After these, again, are recited the opposite evils or curses, disease, famine, war, desolation, and captivity.

The 30th chapter goes further, and foresees the tribes of Israel under punishment and expelled from their home, or taken captive by other nations. Then follows the preaching of repentance, so powerfully carried out by Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, and other prophets of a later time. Turning to God with the heart, and hearkening again to His voice, the people were to be restored to their land and to His favour. Of this, Moses was permitted to give them early assurance; and thus with a breath of mercy and hope ended his weighty discourse to the people. Think of the aged prophet thus foreseeing the mischief that would come on a rebellious people, and hear him crying aloud, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him, for He is thy life, and the length of thy days.”†

Before we leave these discourses, let us look at three passages which bear on Christ and the Gospel. Christ quoted three sayings from Deuteronomy; three other sayings are quoted in reference to Christ.

1. Deut. xviii. 15-19.—“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of

\* Gal. iii. 10.

† Deut. xxx. 19, 20.

thy brethren, like unto me, unto Him ye shall hearken," &c. The application of this oracle to Christ has been disputed. We firmly hold it, for the following reasons:—

(a.) The promise of this great Prophet was first given by the Lord to Moses at Horeb, or Sinai, in the day when the people were afraid of direct communications from God. Moses then acted as mediator, and stood between Jehovah and the people. There is no prophet like to him as mediator till we come to Jesus Christ.

(b.) It was the glory of Moses that he had charge, as a steward, over the house of God; organiser of the holy nation, and founder under Divine direction of the entire Hebrew form and dispensation of religion. Many prophets and prophetesses arose after him, but were not like him in position, only built on his foundation, developed and applied under Divine impulse, the laws and principles which Moses laid down. At last came Jesus Christ, like unto Moses in having the care and administration of God's house, but greater, and worthy of more honour, because not the steward, but the Son. Apostles and prophets followed Him, but only continued what He did and taught, developed and applied under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, principles and precepts, which the Master had laid down, and which are most fully and affectionately delivered in the New Testament Deuteronomy—the Gospel according to St. John.

(c.) It appears from the language of the woman at Sychar (John iv. 25), that the Samaritans expected the Messiah to be a great prophet and teacher. Now the Samaritans received only the Pentateuch, and while there are other passages in the Pentateuch that refer to a Mes-

siah, there is none but this on which they could have founded the expectation, that, when Messiah came, He would "tell them all things."

(*d.*) The Jews and Galileans found a testimony to Christ in the writings of Moses, as well as the prophets; and our Lord Himself warned the Jews that Moses, in whom they trusted, would accuse them of disobedience to His words. Now there is no other passage than this, in the writings of Moses, that warns against disobedience to the words of the great future Prophet of God.

(*e.*) This passage is expressly interpreted of Jesus Christ by the Apostle Peter, and seems to be quoted in the same sense by the first martyr, Stephen. See Acts iii. 22, 23; vii. 37.

The sum of the matter is that Jesus the Christ is the Greater than Moses—the Prophet of Prophets, on Whom rested, without measure, the Spirit of the Lord.

2. Deut. xxi. 23.—"He that is hanged is accursed of God." This is the passage quoted in Gal. iii. 13, and brings before us the cross of Christ, and the Crucified One hanging dead upon it, "made a curse for us." For Jews or Gentiles to seek justification by the Law is a course of infatuation, and ends in condemnation and death. Christ is our redemption as a Crucified One from the curse of the Law, that the blessing—not of Moses or the Law, but of Abraham—might come on us Gentiles, and we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

3. Deut. xxx. 11–14.—"For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the

sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."

Compare with this Rom. x. 6-10. St. Paul not merely adopts the language of Moses, but pursues the line of his deepest thought. The prophet anticipated a time when Israel would incur Divine wrath by disobedience, and instructed them to turn with all their hearts to God Himself, whose word was very nigh. The apostle in his time saw Israel going astray from God and His righteousness by misuse of the very law of Moses, and about to incur that penalty of dispersion which lies on them unto this day. Accordingly he laboured to teach them the contrast between righteousness which is of the Law and righteousness which is of God by faith, and in order to this, used the language originally employed by Moses for recalling Israel to God; the distinction, however, being made, that, whereas Moses spoke of the revelation of God as their beneficent Ruler made to Israel, Paul spoke of the fuller revelation of the same God in His Son, and the grace and truth that have come by Jesus Christ. This gospel-teaching, too, the apostle so gave as to enlighten the Gentiles as well as the Jews, because he was a preacher of the gospel of the grace of God to every creature.

The remainder of Deuteronomy contains the farewell and death of Moses, and was written, of course, by a later pen than his own. It forms a touching and dignified conclusion to the whole Pentateuch.

Moses introduced Joshua as his successor, finished the



writing of the Law, and committed the roll to the priests, with injunction that it should be read aloud at the Feast of Tabernacles in every seventh year. The stone tables of the Law were deposited in the ark, and the book of the Law was to rest beside the ark of the covenant.

Thereafter, the aged leader spoke the words of a grand prophetic song in the ears of all the congregation, yet demanded a greater audience,—“Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.”\* It is a song of mercy and of judgment, extolling God’s perfections, reproving Israel’s perversities, and, in language which shows Moses to have been as great a poet to the very last as he was forty years before, when he composed the sublime song at the Red Sea,—the oldest lyric in the world.

Having thus rounded his career in the wilderness with holy song, the leader of Israel gave to the tribes his prophetic blessing, with especial regard therein to their future destiny, as dividers and occupiers of the soil of Palestine. The only tribe omitted is Simeon, which had recently sinned very grievously with the Midianites, under the counsel of Balaam. Accordingly, when the land was divided among the Israelites, Simeon got, not an independent district, but a tract of land “within the inheritance of the children of Judah.”†

Finally, Moses died. There was no dimness in his eye, though his years were an hundred and twenty. No look of a dying man had he, nor did his step falter, as he climbed the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah. It was a deliberate march to death and burial. Having

\* Deut. xxxii. 1.

† Josh. xix. 1.



reached the summit, he saw the whole land of Canaan at his feet, drew the mighty view into his soul, then closed his eyes, and passed to God. His sepulchre no man knows to this day. Those of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Rachel, and David are all well known, but the sepulchre of Moses, the greatest man of his nation, can no one trace. We gather from the New Testament that Michael, an high prince with God, angel-protector of the house of Israel, guarded the prophet's body, and rebuked Satan, who resisted its resurrection. That it was raised is inferred, from the appearance of Moses in a glorified body with Elias, on the mount of our Lord's transfiguration.

It was essential to the typical meaning and purpose of this history that Moses should not cross the river, for he was the representative man of the Law, and the Law brings no one into rest. For himself, too, it was better to depart. He got something nobler far than an entrance into Canaan,—a home with God and the departed worthies. Yet there is something very touching in his death, on the very edge of the promised land. An end like his has been not infrequent among great leaders of intellectual or religious life. They labour and see not, or, if they foresee, enjoy not the fruit of their labours. A hero falls in the very arms of victory, a scientific genius surrenders to others the advantage of his discoveries, reformers and missionaries of truth and progress often die on the threshold of success, leaving it to others to accomplish what they could not continue, "by reason of death." A striking precedent there is in the death of Moses, the man of God. A lesson, too, of submission and contentment.

“ And had he not high honour—  
The hill-side for his pall ;  
To lie in state while angels wait,  
With stars for tapers all ;  
And the dark rock-pines, like tossing plumes,  
Over his bier to wave,  
And God's own hand, in the lonely land,  
To lay him in the grave !

“ O lonely tomb in Moab's land !  
O dark Beth-Peor's hill !  
Speak to these curious hearts of ours,  
And teach them to be still !  
God hath His mysteries of grace,  
Ways that we cannot tell,  
And hides them deep, like the secret sleep,  
Of him he loved so well.”

## JOSHUA.

HERE begins the second division of the Hebrew Bible,—the earlier Prophets, comprising the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

The book which we have now reached has fine characteristics as a history, and is, moreover, very rich in Christian suggestion. Like the Books of Moses, it is free from any hero-worship, or glorying in man; but Joshua, whether the author of the book or no, is throughout the chief figure—the narrative opening with his installation to office, and closing with his death. This Joshua was a prince of the tribe of Ephraim, born in Egypt, and, after the exodus, selected by Moses as his attendant or adjutant-general in the host of Israel. It was he who led the fighting-men in their successful combat with the Amalekites at Rephidim, soon after the passage of the Red Sea. It was he who attended Moses in the Mount, and was thus absent from the camp at the time of the idolatrous worship of the golden calf. It was he who stood alone by the side of faithful Caleb, in giving a report of the exploration of Canaan. Forty years thereafter, the chief command fell by Divine appointment to him as the successor of Moses. Like the great leader, he had been most carefully trained

and proved for his lofty enterprise, and entered on his command apparently about the same age as his predecessor,—at or about eighty years. He filled his post for nearly thirty years, and died at the ripe age of one hundred and ten.

This book easily breaks into two parts, each consisting of twelve chapters,—the former treating of the conquest, and the latter of the distribution, of the promised land. With an introduction and an epilogue, these are the contents of the work. Our plan, however, is to take the history as a whole, and thereafter point out the Christian meanings that underlie the narrative, or are suggested thereby.

## I. THE HISTORY.

1. *Of the Invasion.*—Happily, the authority of Joshua was undisputed. Moses, before his death, had publicly transferred to him his own leadership, and after the great prophet's decease, the Lord confirmed the succession, and promised to be with the new leader, as He had been with the old. So Moses seemed to live again in Joshua, and to him the people hearkened as they had hearkened to Moses. He did all that his predecessor could possibly have done, if he had personally led the invasion, and he exhibited throughout the very mind of Moses,—the same loyalty to God, love to Israel, and personal disinterestedness, taking nothing for himself, his private enrichment, or family promotion, but seeking the good of all Israel, and finding his own joy in their obedience and prosperity.

In the first steps that Joshua took, one sees the promptitude and wariness which together mark the good com-

mander. Having given orders that the host should be ready to cross the river Jordan in three days, he quietly despatched two scouts, who made their way into the fortified town of Jericho. Having been sheltered there by a woman named Rahab, whose life and household were afterwards spared for this good service, the scouts returned with the welcome news that the approach of Israel had stricken the Canaanites with terror. "All the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us."

Joshua was glad to learn that the passage of the river was not to be disputed by a hostile army, and gave Israel the order to advance. The river, however, itself presented a great difficulty, for it was swollen in consequence of the melting of the snows on Lebanon. Yet the transit must be made, and made at that very spot, for the Lord had told His people to pass over "right against Jericho." As at the Red Sea, so at the river, the simple duty of Israel was to "go forward;" and the Lord, who had taken their fathers through the sea, took the children through the stream of Jordan. Joshua, indeed, had no rod to stretch out, for he was a man of war; and when he lifted his hand, he stretched out the spear. Wonders were now done by the sacred ark; and, as the feet of the priests, bearing that symbol of God's throne, touched the river at its brink, the waters of Jordan were held back on the upper side, and those below running down to the Dead Sea, a broad passage was opened to the mighty host. All passed over dry-shod, while the priests, with the ark, stood still to the last moment in the bed of the river. Twelve stones for a memorial—one for each tribe—were taken from the channel of the stream. Then Joshua

“commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan. And it came to pass . . . that the waters of Jordan returned to their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.”\*

The first encampment of Israel in the land was at Gilgal, near Jericho. There, by divine command, the males of all the tribes born in the wilderness were circumcised, for that rite had fallen into abeyance during the pilgrimage. Then the passover was kept, in memory of the night in which Israel was saved by the blood of the Lamb. Manna ceased, and the invaders ate of the produce of the land of Canaan. They had entered on the land in a marvellous manner, without a sword drawn, or a life forfeited.

2. *Of the Conquest.*—A vision of God was given to Joshua alone, with directions for the first exploit of the war, the capture of the frontier city Jericho. It was a walled town, and the invaders had no battering-rams or other instruments known to ancient warriors for the reduction of strongholds. But Joshua obeyed the divine command, ordered the ark to be carried round the city for seven days—a sevenfold or perfect demonstration of faith in God—and the place was taken. “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.”†

Yet, close on victory came defeat, for presumptuous sin was found in Israel. Orders had been issued to bring the precious metals found in Jericho to the sacred treasury, and to destroy all other spoil by fire. But Achan saw, coveted, took, and hid in the ground a Babylonish garment, and a wedge of gold. For this the whole nation suffered.

\* Josh. iv. 17, 18.

† Heb. xi. 30.

The expedition against the town of Ai failed, and Joshua was deeply grieved. Then followed inquiry, detection of the sinner, and public infliction of death, as a solemn warning to all against covetousness, deceit, and the violation of the strict discipline which is essential to military success. This done, the valley of Achor became "a door of hope."\* The host went forth with better success, the defeat was turned into victory, and the city of Ai was taken.

Thereafter ensued a brief pause in the war, while the directions of Moses were carried out in regard to the rehearsal of the Law, with blessings for obedience, and curses for disobedience. An altar was reared on Mount Ebal, and half of the tribes stood (no doubt by their representatives) on that mount, and half on Gerizim, while Joshua read aloud all that Moses commanded. Thus were the people opportunely admonished, that their continuance in the land which they had begun to conquer depended entirely on their compliance with Jehovah's will.

The 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters describe continued conquest. The Gibeonites submitted themselves in subtility, but the tribes of Canaan generally made a stout resistance. Joshua first encountered the southern confederacy, then turned against the northern, and in both cases with complete success, for he "took the whole land." The greatest battle of the war was that of Beth-Horon, in which the pursuit of the flying foe was facilitated by a wondrous prolongation of daylight, poetically described as a standing still of the sun upon Gibeon, and of the moon in the valley of Ajalon.

\* Hosea ii. 15.



The 11th chapter ends with the words, "for the land rested from war." The 12th has a list of the conquered chiefs or kings. So the Lord God drove out the heathen who had defiled His land. And the conquerors "got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but His right hand and His arm and the light of His countenance, because He had a favour unto them."\*

3. *Of the distribution of the land.*—Part of the country was still held by the Canaanites, but its conquest was assumed, and for purposes of allocation the whole land was reckoned as in the possession of Israel. The tribal districts were then apportioned by lot.

Many interesting details enliven the topographical portion of the book. We find the venerable Caleb putting in a special claim to Hebron, on the ground of a grant made to him by Moses after he had explored the land; and we can imagine the joy with which Joshua allowed the claim of his old comrade. We are disappointed to learn that the two strongest tribes, Judah and Ephraim, could not drive out all the heathen from their lands, for the Jebusites still held Jerusalem, and Canaanites dwelt in Gezer. The tabernacle was set up in Shiloh within the tribe of Ephraim, and thither were the people gathered, as to the centre of worship. Joshua took no inheritance for himself, but the whole nation gratefully assigned one to him—Timnath-Serah, in Mount Ephraim.

Thereafter the cities of refuge were appointed at proper distances, and the cities of the Levites designated by lot.

\* Ps. xliv. 3.

Then all was finished. "There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel. All came to pass."\* The men of the two tribes and a half, who had got their lands from Moses, on the east side of the Jordan, had honourably helped their brethren in the war. These were now sent back to Bashan and Gilead, with a solemn charge, not to break the religious unity of Israel. So this part of the history is closed. There remains an account:—

4. *Of the dying counsels and death of Joshua.*—Apparently, there are two addresses of the aged hero, to the elders, judges, and officers of all Israel; the second being given with great solemnity at Shechem, which may be reckoned the capital of Palestine for the time. At that memorable spot, Abraham first built an altar in the land. There Jacob buried the household images under the oak. There the ark had been placed during the rehearsal of the Law, with blessings and curses, for Shechem is between Ebal and Gerizim; and there the children of Israel laid the embalmed body of the illustrious prince Joseph, which they had carried with them from Egypt, according to his dying injunction.

Joshua was not a poet like Moses, and composed no song. The prophetic spirit, however, rested on him, and in his last exhortation, in which he charged the people, and took them bound to serve Jehovah, he appears to have had a foreboding of evil to come. One of his last acts was to set up in Shechem a pillar of stone, according to the custom of the age, as a permanent witness to the people, lest they should deny their God. Then the good

\* Josh. xxi. 45.

soldier passed away. To him is given at his death the same title as was given to Moses, "the servant of the Lord." "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that over-lived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord that He had done for Israel."\*

## II. THE APPLICATION OF THIS NARRATIVE.

1. *To Church history.*—The Book of Joshua suggests that of the Acts of the Apostles. Moses lived again in Joshua. Jesus lives—not in another, but Himself, risen from the dead, both "Leader and Commander of the people"—Moses and Joshua in one. Thus the book called Acts of the Apostles is properly the book of the Acts of the living Christ, in and by His Apostles, evangelists, deacons, martyrs, and people. It is He who all through that book exercises authority, shows vitality and power. Jesus Christ, living in, and leading on, the Church by the Spirit, is the Joshua of our profession. He led the Church through baptism into death, as through the bed of deep waters; and by the power of His resurrection brought up the disciples into a new position, one of promise and grace, but therefore too of risk and conflict.

As, at the outset, Israel was hindered by walled Jericho, so at the beginning of Church history, the apostles and brethren had to face the ignorance and prejudice of the men of Jerusalem. The war must begin there, and they had no might or power with which to prevail. So they compassed the city about for seven days—*i.e.*, they continued for that space with one accord in prayer and supplication. When

\* Josh. xxiv. 31.

the day of Pentecost was fully come, the trumpet was blown by Simon Peter, the walls of resistance fell, and the campaign of the Church was well commenced. That first victory was the earnest of all victories. If the Israelites were discouraged at any later stage of their war, they had but to remember Jericho. If Christian preachers or workers are discouraged, they ought to remember Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

But Achan sinned and was punished. So Ananias and Sapphira thought to hide what they had done, but their covetousness and deceit were exposed before all, and they suffered the penalty of death. Israel was victorious so soon as the hidden evil was put away;—so the Church, after judgment on the deceivers, had new successes, and the word of the Lord prevailed. “By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people, and believers were the more added unto the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”\*

Joshua led the tribes to many battle-fields. Christ led the Church, under such officers as Peter, John, Paul, and others of smaller fame but like precious faith, into many and severe battles; at Samaria, Antioch, Damascus, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. Some good soldiers of Christ lost their lives for His sake in the struggle. It was to them no loss, but great gain, and the good cause went forward. The Gospel was spread abroad in the face of all that wicked men or heathen demons could do to prevent it, and the plantation of organised Churches, with elders in every city, was as

\* Acts v. 12-14.

the settlement of the tribes in their inheritances, to possess the land for God.

Worship centred at Shiloh=in peace.—The Church has not one central place on earth, but it has one sanctuary, and one element of worship—holy peace. We have to fight in many places, and with many foes, but we worship spiritually only in one holy place, through one Name, and in the Shiloh of Gospel peace.

Alas! Canaanites left in the land corrupted Israel. Some of the tribes put the natives to tribute, insensibly adopted their idolatries, and, in the end, became weaker than they, and actually had to serve the Canaanites. So in the Church, Jewish traditions, heathen errors and customs, and vain speculations were allowed to remain, and mix themselves with the Gospel. It was thought that they would be useful in service, or in paying tribute, but the result was corruption of faith, worship, and life. Many Churches lost their liberty, and were beguiled of their reward. Indeed, these evils continue to this very day. It is a plague in all the Churches, that the Canaanite is yet in the house of the Lord of Hosts.

No wonder that there follows the troubled Book of Judges, and a parallel to it also in the confusions and vicissitudes that have marked the history of the Church.

2. *To individual Christian experience.*—The book before us sets forth the wrestlings of the “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,” their contendings with deadly foes. An Israelite under Joshua had to fight with flesh and blood, in order to obtain temporal blessings in earthly places. A Christian, under the Spirit of Christ, has to

fight with spiritual wickedness, in order to enjoy eternal blessings in heavenly places.

You begin this, O Christian, by death, burial, and resurrection with Christ—separated by those waters of Jordan from the Moses or Law under which you were bound. Crucified with Christ, nevertheless you live. And, as an Israelite who had come up out of the swellings of Jordan was led to Gilgal, and had, as his first painful duty, to submit to circumcision of the flesh, so, when you emerge and rise up together with Christ, you must, as counting yourself to have died and risen, “mortify *therefore* your members which are upon the earth.”\* At this Gilgal, too, this first station, consider well and enjoy Christ, your pass-over, sacrificed for you. Before you can fight the fight of faith, you must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Corn of the land is also ready to your need, for the place of conflict is also sure to prove a place of spiritual nourishment.

Now, in the name of the Lord, set up your banners, take the aggressive, fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life. Some walled Jericho bars your way—only have faith in God, and the walls shall fall flat to the ground. If you should have defeat after such a victory, diligently inquire, have great searchings of heart, till the Achan in your bosom is detected and slain. Very likely, it will prove to be some temptation of gold, or pride of life, that has compromised your integrity. When the evil is utterly abhorred and renounced, you shall have new victories, and your valley of trouble will unfold a door of hope. And so, on and on, till you get your bright inheritance. If indeed you make leagues when you should

\* Col. iii. 1-7.

make conquests, the inheritance will be meagre. But if you fight faithfully, not even the Anakim of spiritual wickedness can withstand you. You shall have a large possession, and "stand in your lot at the end of the days."

Joshua himself was an heir, and his inheritance was in the midst of the land. Jesus Christ is "Heir of all things," and He is in the midst, and all the heirs of God are grouped around Him. Joshua died, but the Captain of our salvation dies no more, and our inheritance no one can take from us, because we hold it of Him, and with Him, who lives for ever and ever.

"Stand then in His great might,  
With all His strength endued,  
But take, to arm you for the fight,  
The panoply of God.

"From strength to strength go on,  
Wrestle, and fight, and pray,  
Tread all the powers of darkness down,  
And win the well-fought day."



## JUDGES.

THIS is a disappointing book as regards the moral and religious condition of Israel, but rich in varied interest, telling us the most romantic incidents,—depicting ancient manners, and illustrating the union of the Hebrew faith with the rough heroism of troublous times. The history covers nearly four centuries. The writer is unknown. The Jews ascribe the work to Samuel, and there are good reasons for assigning it either to him or to some other prophet living in the early part of the reign of King Saul. That it was composed or compiled after the institution of the kingdom is implied by the repeated expression, “In those days, when there was no king in Israel.” And that it was composed before the kingdom fell to David appears from the statement in the first chapter, that “the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.” Now, we know that one of the first acts of King David was to expel the Jebusites from Jerusalem, and therefore fix the date of the authorship of this book in the time of Saul.

The Judges are the Deliverers raised up by the God of Israel to rescue His people from the power of their enemies. The rank was not hereditary in any family, nor was the dignity confined to any one tribe. The title *Shophetim*

seems to have been taken from the Canaanites or Phœnicians. The Carthaginians carried the name from Phœnicia, and their rulers in the time of the Punic Wars are termed the Suffetes by the Roman historian, Livy. The Hebrew *Shophetim*, however, had no regularly constituted magistracy, but an extraordinary and exceptional authority. The people they governed were semi-barbarous; their manners were rough, and the period almost anarchic.

I. The introduction to the history occupies two chapters, and a few verses of the third. We are informed that some of the tribes, after the death of Joshua, continued their war with the Canaanites who remained in the country, but they stopped short, and allowed their enemies to retain nearly all the sea-coast, and several strongholds in the interior. The result was, in the next generation, a decay of faith and corruption of life among the Israelites. The defeated system had its revenge in adulterating and enfeebling that which had conquered it. The Canaanite idolatry did more damage than the Canaanite sword, for the children of Israel were beguiled, and actually forsook Jehovah, the God of Abraham, and Moses, and Joshua, to serve the Phœnician deities, Baal and Ashtoreth.

So this book begins with the failure of Israel, their lack of persevering energy, and their adoption of the very heathenism which God had sent them to drive from His land. He called them to repentance at Bochim; but they relapsed and intermarried with the Canaanites. "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgat the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves."\* The results were, first, corruption from within,

\* Judges iii. 7.

then oppression and hostility from without; and Israel, forgetting the Lord who had set them free, had to pass again under yokes of bondage.

II. The main history—the body of the work—describes a succession of foreign invasions and conquests, cries of distress from Israel to Jehovah, and His deliverances of the oppressed through the prowess of the Judges.

There are six conquests and redemptions,—

Oppressors.	Deliverers.
1. Mesopotamians.	Othniel.
2. Moabites.	Ehud.
3. North Canaanites.	Deborah and Barak.
4. Midianites.	Gideon.
5. Ammonites.	Jephthah.
6. Philistines.	Samson.

1. A Mesopotamian king first invaded the land, and held Israel under his yoke for eight years. Of him we know nothing further, and he is the only invader from the far east, during all the period covered by this book. When the children of Israel cried to God, He gave them a champion in Othniel, the valiant nephew and son-in-law of Caleb, a powerful prince or lion of the tribe of Judah. "The spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the Lord delivered Chushan-Rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand." Forty years of peace succeeded, but then, after Othniel's death, the people fell back into their old sins. The penalty was,—

2. A second yoke of bondage. The king of Moab, aided by the Ammonites and Amalekites, smote Israel, and possessed himself of Jericho. His mastery continued for eighteen years. But again Israel cried unto the Lord, and

got deliverance, though in a manner less glorious than the open war which Othniel had led. A wily Benjamite obtained admission to the presence of the portly king Eglon, assassinated him, and escaped. Then, calling his countrymen to the rescue, he intercepted the flying Moabites at the fords of the Jordan, and slew them to a man. "Then the land had rest fourscore years."

The Philistines were the next to make an inroad on Israel. We shall hear more of them hereafter. Like the Israelites, they had not been long in the land, and are supposed to have crossed over to the shores of Asia from Crete and other islands. They were bitter enemies of God's peculiar people, and yet, curiously enough, their name is stamped upon the promised land in one of its favourite designations, for Palestine is just the land of Philistia. Their first attack seems to have been easily repulsed by a warrior named Shamgar, who made great slaughter with an ox-goad—a long staff, shod with iron—a primitive weapon, but formidable in the hands of a mighty man.

The children of Israel, however, were their own greatest enemies. Too carnally minded to preserve the faith and worship established by Moses, they relapsed again and again into the habits of the tribes around them. So they suffered more and more.

3. A formidable northern king of Canaanites, named Jabin, subdued the degenerate nation, and held them under his yoke for twenty long years. They felt themselves helpless under the military power of Jabin, whose general, Sisera, could bring nine hundred war chariots into the field, while Israel had not one. Again the people

cried unto the Lord, and again deliverance came. Deborah, a prophetess, was the divine instrument for rousing the fallen nation. It was her custom to sit with primitive simplicity under a palm tree, hard by the place where an earlier Deborah—the nurse of Rebecca—was buried under an oak. Thither she summoned Barak, a northern warrior, one of that tribe of Naphthali which was nearest to the fortress of King Jabin, and therefore suffered at his hand most heavily. She delivered to Barak the command of the Lord God of Israel, that he should lead a patriot army against the host of Sisera. She even accompanied him on his way to rouse the tribes. Zebulon and Naphthali responded well to the summons; Dan and Asher on the seashore did not. After much debate, Reuben and others, settled on the east of the Jordan, came not up. The dwellers in the town of Meroz were stigmatised as shamefully inactive. But Barak took the field with ten thousand infantry. In the great battle which ensued, a heavy storm, beating in the faces of the Canaanites, threw them into confusion, and they were routed with terrible slaughter,—their chariots and horses only hindering them in the marshy ground, and the swellings of the river Kishon. Sisera himself fled for his life, but was murdered in sleep by a Bedouin woman, in whose tent he sought shelter. The success of that memorable day is celebrated in an ode of wonderful poetic fire, composed by Deborah,—the only outpouring of the prophetic soul on record, from the death of Moses till we reach the times of Hannah and Samuel.

Again the land had rest; but, returning to sin, the people fell again under the yoke of bondage. It was the

4. Fourth oppression. The Midianites from Arabia were

now the invaders. They swept away the produce of the fertile land, and left Israel to the peril of famine. This tribulation lasted for seven years, and was relieved just as those which went before. Israel cried in distress to Jehovah. He heard, and raised up from amongst themselves a deliverer. It was Gideon, of the tribe of Manasseh, the finest character and truest hero of all that troubled time,—one who seems at once to recall the courage and conduct of Joshua, and to anticipate the grace and royal manner of David. He had lowliness of mind,—not assuming the first position till God called him to it,—but he had great capacities for command, uniting caution with firmness, and wariness in counsel with impetuous vigour of action.

Gideon began well by making war on the idolatry of his own neighbourhood, overthrowing the altar of Baal, and establishing an important influence over the minds and consciences of his own people. Then, rallying to his standard the men of Manasseh, and of those northern tribes in which the spirit of independence seems to have been strongest, Gideon threw himself into the battle of freedom with confidence in God. At the head of a select band of three hundred men, he surprised the Midianite camp by night, and the Arabs fled with loud cries of terror. This success was followed up with the utmost energy, and the yoke of Midian was completely broken.

Thereupon the Israelites invited their captain to become a king over them and to accept the regal dignity for his family. He refused, but retained for himself a sort of priestly position, which did not belong to him under the Law, and, though doubtless well meant, proved a snare to him and his house. It was his mistake, and Gideon was



not a perfect man, but, on the whole, he proved an admirable leader of Israel, and under him "the country was in quietness forty years."

There followed, however, a time of confusion. Abimelech, a son of Gideon, snatched at the sovereignty which the hero had declined, and cruelly put his father's sons to death, that he might reign without a rival. His success, however, was short-lived, and he died before the strong tower of Thebez, which he attempted to burn.

Little is known of the two judges who followed—Tola of Issachar, and Jair of Gilead; but they seem to have ruled well during fifty-five years. Thereafter, the sad story repeats itself. Israel sinned more and more, and adopted the idolatry of all the surrounding nations. The same penalty followed as before.

5. There was a fifth conquest by the Ammonites and their allies, who held the country of Israel, east of the Jordan, in subjection for eighteen years. Appeal, at last, being made to Jehovah, help came through Jephthah, a man of Gilead. This rugged chieftain, perhaps we should say freebooter, was well adapted to the emergency, and the Lord made use of him. He rose to the height of the occasion, and defeated the Ammonites with great slaughter. But the memory of Jephthah is not one that we love. There is, to say the least, a horrid uncertainty about his treatment of his innocent daughter, in fulfilment of a rash vow that he had made before going into battle. It was an age of rash vows, as one may see in the vow of the whole nation against the tribe of Benjamin, at the end of this book, or that of king Saul, which nearly cost Jonathan his life. The last named vow, indeed has an ominous bearing on



this of Jephthah. Jonathan would have been slain if the army had not interposed, but there is no mention of any interposition on behalf of Jephthah's daughter. It has, indeed, been strongly argued by some that she was not put to death, but devoted as a virgin to the Divine service. We observe that such recent and able writers as Dean Stanley and Dr. Lindsay Alexander, take opposite sides of this question.\* Reluctantly, we fear that the darker view of this tragedy is the correct one. True it is that human sacrifices were not permitted in Israel, and that such an immolation as we now speak of could not have been offered on the altar of burnt-offering at the tabernacle; but Jephthah lived in Gilead, and Gilead adjoined the countries of Moab and Ammon, where human sacrifices were not at all unknown. If the semi-barbarous Jephthah thought himself bound to put his daughter to death, it is at least some relief to know that the maiden was not dragged unwilling to her doom, but, with a touching heroism, yielded her young life, as she supposed, for her father's duty and her native land.

Another painful recollection of Jephthah's time is the first outbreak of civil war in Israel. The haughty tribe of Ephraim upbraided the new judge for going to war without their co-operation. Jephthah had no soft answer to turn away their wrath. Hot words led to blows, and there ensued a battle between the men of the west and the men of the east—the men of Ephraim and the men of Gilead. The former were put to flight, and being intercepted at the fords of the river Jordan, were detected

\* *Vide* Stanley's *Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church*, Part I. pp. 357-361, second edition; and *Sunday Magazine*, Jan. 1871.

by a peculiarity of pronunciation in the now proverbial word, *Shibboleth*, and were ruthlessly slain.

Jephthah's rule was short—only six years. The three judges who followed cover no more than twenty-five years of the history.

6. Again a declension in Israel, and again a subdual. It was the sixth. The Philistines attacked in force, and succeeded in holding Israel under subjection for forty years. But God prepared a champion of Israel, in the tribe of Dan—Samson, in many respects the most remarkable man in all this history—the pure Nazarite, and yet the careless lover; the man of weakness and the man of might, whose life was full of playful humour, but ended in tragical suffering and death. He is a beacon to us, to warn against fleshly indulgence. The voice of Delilah may be sweet, but the hands of the Philistine lords are cruel. The pleasures of sin are for a season, but they lead to the dungeon of blindness and captivity. Nevertheless, Samson is a mighty man in this history; he delivered Israel by the faith which had previously sustained Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah. All through his life and yet more triumphantly in his death, he weakened the Philistines and poured contempt on Dagon their god.

“—————Samson hath quit himself  
Like Samson ; and heroically hath finish'd  
A life heroical.”

With the vivid and romantic history of Manoah's son, the main body of the Book of Judges may be said to end. There remains,—

III. AN APPENDIX,—to illustrate the lawlessness and

confusion which ensued in a time when every man did that which was right in his own eyes. No part of the Bible forms such painful reading as this. Idolatry, impurity, and cruelty mark the period,—a sort of wild justice and equally wild mercy.\* Finally, the days of the commonwealth evidently drew to a close, the people being unfit for such a government, or unworthy of it. The days of the kingdom drew nigh.

1. A few words must be said on the morality of the Book of Judges. No Divine sanction is given to any act of treachery or cruelty recorded in this history; but, on the other hand, no disapproval is expressed. This is according to the usual tenor of sacred story, which narrates

\* “It was a period of great lawlessness and of the most rude and imperfect morality. . . . There is a strange mixture of religion and barbarity—two ingredients which now appear utterly incongruous, however often conjoined in these rude and rudimental stages of the Church.”—*Dr. Chalmers’ Daily Scripture Readings*.

Dean Stanley draws an ingenious parallel between the times of the Judges and what are called the Middle Ages.

“The house of Micah and his Levite set forth the exact likeness of the feudal castle and feudal chieftain of our early civilisation. The Danites, eager to secure to their enterprise the sanction of a sacred personage and of sacred images, are the forerunners of that strange mixture of faith and superstition, which prompted in the Middle Ages so many pious thefts of relics, so many extortions of unwilling benedictions. . . . Priests and Levites wander to and fro over Palestine; mendicant friars and sellers of indulgences over Europe. . . . All things were as yet in chaos and confusion: yet the germs of a better life were everywhere at work. In the one, the judge was gradually blending into the hereditary king. In the other, the feudal chief was gradually passing into the constitutional sovereign. The youth of Samuel, the childhood of David, were nursed under this wild system. The schools of the prophets, the universities of Christendom, owe their first impulse to this first period of Jewish and of Christian history.”—*Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church*, Part I., pp. 311-313, 2d Ed.

facts without comment, and leaves them to be dealt with by the moral sense of future generations.

Confessedly the moral tone of those times in Israel was low. The light was dim, and men never live beyond their light,—seldom up to it. The heroes of the book are not proposed as models for a later time, least of all for the Christian ages. They were stern chieftains, ruthless swordsmen, but they were fit for the work to be done, and were raised up by God to do it. The very imperfection of their characters brings out in stronger relief the grand element of their success—their faith in God. “Through faith they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”\*

2. Of the application of all this narrative to Christian times.

(1.) *To Church History.*—As Israel did well during the time of the elders who overlived Joshua, so the Church did well during the Apostolic age. But then ensued a time of evil compromise. The Church failed to make a clean end of her intellectual and spiritual enemies. Consequently, Christian faith soon began to be corrupted by “philosophy falsely so called,” and Christian worship by the adaptation of heathen rites and ceremonies. Many things of Pagan origin were first tolerated, then held to be “sanctified by adoption into the Church.” Because Pagan Rome had a Pontifex Maximus, Christian Rome took a Pontifex Maximus also. The doctrines of merit, holy

\* Heb. xi. 33, 34.

water, penances, purgatory, prayers for the dead, the offering and worship of a bread wafer, processions of images, adoration of relics, and various festivals, were all characteristic of heathenism, and were insidiously introduced into the rapidly degenerating Church. In the end, the visible Church became quite heathenised. It is just what happened to Israel through conformity to the customs of the Canaanites.

The Lord helped Israel when they cried; and the Lord raised up deliverers for His Church at intervals, according to His own good pleasure. These were not perfect men, or enlightened on every point of duty any more than Barak or Gideon were; but they checked the degeneracy for a time, and revived in some measure the primitive faith. Let any one read an honest book of Church history, and he will find the narrative disappointing and painful, yet very interesting, because so chequered and eventful,—just like the Book of Judges. It is full of oppressions and deliverances, relapses and reformations, revivals and declines. So will it continue to be, till Christ shall sit on the throne of His father David.

(2.) *To the experience of many.*—We get peace of soul, rest under Joshua—*i.e.*, Jesus; but, alas! there are Canaanites left in the heart, and we yield to them, or make leagues privately with them—not able, as we say, to put them out. So we are compromised, defiled, sometimes taken captive by the law of sin in our members. We cry to God, and He helps us. Again we decay, and He restores us. 'Tis a strange struggle, this Christian life,—now defeated, and now victorious,—now groaning that we

are wretched men, and now thanking God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Yet let none think that it is better, if the Christian experience be such, to have none of it. Even in the worst times, it was better to be of Israel than to be of Moab, Midian, or Ammon, and better surely to be a blind Samson, the Israelite, who had fallen and repented, than to sit in Dagon's temple with the Philistine lords. "Happy art thou, Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?" Foolish and perverse hast thou been, but Jehovah hears thy cries, and will not let thee seek His face in vain. Happy are ye, O people of Christ! grace will bring you through all your trials, and out of all oppressions of the enemy. Rejoice that your Deliverer is not like those dying men who judged Israel for a few short years. "The Lord is your Judge, the Lord is your Law-giver, the Lord is your King; He will save you."\*

\* Isa. xxxiii. 22.

## RUTH.

THE end of the Book of Judges grates upon the soul,—all the more welcome the history of Ruth. We turn from shocking stories of wickedness and cruelty, and fall with joy on this sweet pastoral tale, showing us the bright side of the old Hebrew manner of life, and the blessed power of the Hebrew faith to lighten the burden of poverty and grief. Nor is this book to be read merely as an interesting and touching story. It is full of spiritual instruction, and good Gospel doctrine concerning the Lord Jesus as the Kinsman-Redeemer, the salvation of the Gentiles, and the union of the Church, which is the Bride, to the Divine Bridegroom.

The tale begins at Bethlehem-Judah, also called Bethlehem-Ephratah (*the fruitful*), a small town, distant about two hours' journey from Jerusalem. There Rachel died and was buried;—there, afterwards, David fed his father's flocks;—there Christ was born, who was “made of the seed of David, according to the flesh.”

A famine occurred in the land, and was felt even in the rich and fertile country round Bethlehem. Probably it was caused, at least in part, by one of those desolating invasions mentioned in the Book of Judges, and famine



was one of the penalties of disobedience to God, foretold by Moses.\*

A man of Bethlehem-Judah, who bore the noble name of Elimelech (*God is King*), left his impoverished home, and with his wife and two sons went to sojourn in the land of Moab, that hilly region south-east of the Dead Sea where Lot's descendants dwelt. It is hard for us to judge the conduct of a man in straits; but, to say the least, that of Elimelech was questionable in leaving the people and altars of Jehovah, to dwell in a land of vileness and idolatry. No doubt he intended only to sojourn there for a season, but he died there. Forsaking Bethlehem to save his life, he lost it. So do many for some temporal advantage abandon situations favourable to their spiritual welfare, and mix with those who are careless and worldly, if not worse, and, alas! never find their way back again to the position which they left, but die at a distance from God.

This was the first stroke to Naomi, the wife of Elimelech, but not the last. "And she was left, and her two sons." Why did they not then return to the land of Judah? Because they felt at home in Moab. The young men had grown up there,—there their characters had taken shape, and to all intents and purposes those sons of Israel were turned Moabites. Surely their mother told them that it was contrary to God's law that they should marry daughters of the heathen, but they pleased themselves; "and they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth."

But the young men—Mahlon and Chilion—died also,

\* See Deut. xxviii. 38-48.

and of the family that left Bethlehem ten years before, Naomi only was left. Attention is drawn to her isolation, "And the woman was left of her two sons and her husband." You see that Naomi is to play an important part in what follows. From all we read of her, we conjecture that she never "took" to Moab as her husband and sons had done. Whether it was so or not, God was pleased to form in her a pious character, and because He loved her, afflicted her with repeated strokes, brought her very low, and made her very lonely, that He might reclaim her to Himself.

Weary of Moab, smitten of God and afflicted, Naomi was disposed to leave the heathen soil, when she heard good tidings that at once decided her course—there was bread enough in the Holy Land. She believed the report, arose, and addressed herself to her journey. But she was not allowed to go alone. Her character and example had exercised an influence on her daughters-in-law, and they, early bereft of their husbands, clung to the Hebrew mother. She suffered them to attend her for a part of the way, and was soothed and cheered by their company. After awhile, she proved them, and with hearty acknowledgment of their dutiful conduct to her sons and herself, put it to them that they should return to their own kindred, and being yet very young women, marry a second time; all the rather that she had no remaining sons to marry them, according to the provisions of the Mosaic law. Her object was to test their real motive, not willing that they should go with her impulsively, and afterwards upbraid her with having marred their worldly comfort or prospect in a land of strangers. But they both declared that they would surely return with her to her people.

So they went on, but as they went, the words of Naomi

wrought in the mind of one of her daughters-in-law; and a second appeal showed a different result. Perhaps at the border of Moab, she paused again, and renewed her suggestion. Then Orpah showed at last what was in her heart. She had sincere affection for her mother-in-law, but no separation from Moab and its idols, no spiritual attraction to Judah's land or Judah's God. So the three women shed tears, and Orpah kissed the Hebrew matron, and went back. The hour of decision had come, and they took opposite paths; Naomi and Ruth to Judah, Orpah to Moab, they to Jehovah's altars, she to the vile groves of Chemosh.

Ruth had a sharp trial, to leave her country, and, at the last moment, part with her sister-in-law and go alone with a poor Hebrew widow to a strange land, where the law excluded a Moabite from the congregation of the Lord.\* But a sacred tie bound Ruth to Naomi's side. Some good thing was in her heart toward the Lord God of Israel, and under His wings she was resolved to trust. So the Gentile took hold of the skirt of the Jewess, and said, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also if aught but death part thee and me."†

Naomi knew the way. She was returning to the home of happier years, and heaviness was on her spirit. All was new to Ruth, and with gladness she must have looked on the land the Lord had blessed, and beheld, as they drew

\* Deut. xxiii. 3.

† Ruth i. 16, 17.

near to Bethlehem, a scene very different from Moab, a country smiling with plenty, for the barley was ready for the sickle.

Their life at Bethlehem began severely. It was a trial to Naomi that she was brought home empty, and had no male relative to provide for her wants. Was it not a trial also for Ruth? Was it for this poverty that she gave up the bread of Moab? Had she not been drawn to Bethlehem by a higher than any worldly motive, she would soon have returned by the way that she came. But no such thought seems to have found place in her, nor did any word of discontent pass her lips. In the spirit of meekness, she persuaded Naomi to sit still, and let her go into the harvest field to win bread for them both.

“Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.” It was of the Lord’s disposing, and not improbably, an answer to the prayers of the lonely Naomi. But it was a “hap,” or chance, so far as any human plan was concerned. Ruth did not ask for the kinsman’s field—seems not to have been aware of his existence, but went out, not knowing whither she went.

In course of the day, Boaz came into the field. The scene between him and the reapers has always been admired for its simple dignity and courtesy. The religion of Israel was by no means stern or gloomy. It said to mowers and binders of sheaves, “The blessing of the Lord be upon you.”\* It threw the light of God over nature and familiar life. It went with men into the fields and market-places, and hallowed the relations of masters and

\* Ps. cxxix. 7, 8.

servants, rich and poor. It taught a master to accost and treat his people as humble friends—not drudges; and servants, to consider and address their masters as their true well-wishers, and not mere “employers of labour.” Surely the Christian religion, if it had fair play, could do as much, and more.

Ascertaining that Ruth was the companion of Naomi, Boaz spoke words of welcome and protection that must have fallen sweetly on the ear of the poor Gentile. It filled her with wonder and joy, to be openly acknowledged and commended by a chief man in Israel; so she fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground. Now Boaz could easily have given to her as much corn as she needed and sent her home, but he did not, for he admired the industry of Ruth, and knew that her bread would be the sweeter for the labour of her hands. Accordingly he assured her of his favour, bade her continue in his fields, made her welcome to share with his handmaidens at meal-time, and directed the young men to let handfuls of barley drop in her path.

So the happy day wore on, and at evening Ruth beat out from her gleanings about an ephah of barley; and her mother-in-law and she had fresh bread to eat, and thankful converse over it. Ruth had nothing to say of the servants in the field, but, in all simplicity, told Naomi of the generous lord of the harvest, whose name was Boaz. Then her mother-in-law, who had, perhaps, secretly wished and prayed for this, but had resolved to make no application to her rich kinsman, told her the position of Boaz towards them. “The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen; and Naomi said unto Ruth, her daughter-in-

law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, to glean unto the end of barley harvest, and of wheat harvest.”\*

Harvest, however, could last only for a few weeks, and the case of Ruth was still a precarious one. She had renounced Moab, and yet had no permanent root or position in Judah. Thinking of this, Naomi said to her, “My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?” The tale which follows needs no apology, for it is quite pure to those who are pure, and to the impure is nothing pure, “but even their mind and conscience is defiled.” It may read strangely, but let us remember that it belongs to a social state, and an order of manners, as different as possible from ours. Naomi suggested nothing that would shock the moral ideas of the time, while she placed a just confidence in the religious integrity of Boaz, and the virtuous simplicity of Ruth.

The joy of harvest had come. Boaz put his own hand to the work of winnowing barley, and having supped with a cheerful heart, fell into a sound sleep at the end of the heap of corn in the thrashing-floor. Then at his feet Ruth lay down in silence. It was the form of claiming the kinsman’s protection. So it fell out as Naomi desired. The good man, finding Ruth at his feet, did her no hurt because she was in his power, nor drove her out to make a show of his virtue, but with the gentle dignity which belonged to him, bade her lie still till morning, promised to do for her the part of a kinsman under the Jewish law, and at daybreak sent her away with a present of six

\* Ruth ii. 22, 23.



measures of barley, the earnest of greater riches soon to be bestowed. The toils of Ruth were over. It was now Boaz that would not rest, until he had performed his promise.

The story of the redemption at the gate of the town furnishes an interesting picture of old Hebrew life, and of the actual operation of the Mosaic law concerning inheritances. It appears that even during the troubled time of the Judges, the people enjoyed the advantage of local courts, held in the most public place and presided over by the men of character and experience, the elders of the city. The transfer of a right of redemption was with a significant token—the pulling-off of a sandal. And nothing of this sort was done in a corner. It was in open court, before the elders and people, so that no subsequent dispute might arise.

Then we have the marriage of Boaz and Ruth—with the first mention in sacred story of a nuptial benediction. In that benediction, reference is made to the patriarchal families, and especially to the house of Pharez, an ancestor of Boaz, because he was the only grandson of Jacob, from whom sprung two generic families in Israel.\* Remark also the characteristic frankness of Scripture, which, in tracing the origin of what may be called the Holy Family, conceals no stain of shame upon the lineage. Tamar and Rahab, both are in the line of which David came, and a Greater than David. The reputation of Ruth is without moral taint, but she also took her place in the family, as a special trophy of the mercy of God, from the doomed people of Moab.

\* See Num. xxvi. 21.



At the end, we see her the happy wife of him who had relieved her want and redeemed the lost inheritance. Our last view of Naomi regards her cherishing her little grandson, for she counted Ruth her daughter; and this little grandson became, in course of years, the grandfather of King David. We see the women of the neighbourhood rejoicing with her, over this happy birth, in Bethlehem. Thus sweet, tender, and natural to the close, is the Book of Ruth. There is no mention of death at the end of it, and the curtain falls on the peaceful family.

There is a scripture here within a scripture—gospel truth under a veil of charming narrative.

A Greater than Boaz is here—Christ the Lord of the harvest, the Supplier of wants, the Redeemer of the Inheritance, the Man who gives rest, the near Kinsman, the Bridegroom of the Church. “To Him shall the Gentiles seek, and His rest shall be glorious.” To Boaz Ruth brought nothing but her needy self, which she laid humbly at his feet. To Christ the Church brings nothing but her needy self, which she prostrates at His feet. But as Ruth was soon rich in all the possessions of Boaz, so is the Church made wealthy for ever in the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Besides this general application, the book admits of a particular application to individual experience, in which may be found no small “use of edifying.”

Let Moab represent the state of alienation from God. Bless His name! there is a way from Moab to Bethlehem, and the melancholy Naomi and the hopeful Ruth shall not err therein. There are Orpahs too. They set out

well, and seem bent on the way of repentance and faith. They are all the more zealous if they have companions of their own age setting out at the same time, and they really appear to have tasted of the heavenly gift. But our Lord Jesus Christ proves all that would follow Him; and if not at the first test, yet at the second the Orpahs fail. They may walk to the very edge of the land of Moab, but there they pause and turn. Their hearts are not yielded to God, and they go back to their own people and their gods—to the world and the world's religion. If they will have it so, the pilgrims who persevere cannot hinder them. One chooses life, and another death; one is taken, and another left.

Then there are great varieties in those who come to God. One has heaviness of heart like Naomi, because of the blows of His hand; another, like Ruth, has eager joy, choosing simply to go and lodge with disciples, to exchange the company of Moab's people for the fellowship of Jehovah's people, and the idols of Moab for Jehovah Himself; determined to live with believers, to die with believers, and with them to be buried so as to rise with them in the resurrection of the just.

The city was moved at the coming of Naomi and Ruth. Would that the Church were stirred with interest and joy to recover those who have been absent for a season, and to gain others who have always been far off, to comfort the Naomis that cannot wear a smiling face at first, and to welcome the Ruths that are brought in from Moab by the grace of God!

By the help of this story, let us trace the experience of some young convert. Ruth, at first, had trial in Beth-

lehem—so perhaps have you. Instead of finding yourself well off, you feel your poverty more than ever; then comes a whisper in your heart, that you cannot be happy in religion, a temptation, too, to go back, at least for a season, into the world. But you will not go back, who have really come to trust under the wings of the Almighty. Rather, you will go forth and glean—you read, and pray, and hear the word, and, or ever you are aware, you are already in the field of Jesus. And He is a near kinsman to you, though you have not known Him. He knows you, and at the first glimpse of His presence you fall down, poor and needy, before Him. Henceforth you shall lack no good thing, only go not to glean in another field, and your bread is given you, and water is sure. The servants have orders to protect you, and the handmaids of the Lord will cheer you, and with them you shall dip your morsel in the wine or sauce of comfort.

Go on to glean. It is no playing at religion any more, but reading and hearing for your life. The servants of Christ have charge given them to show kindness to humble gleaners, to let fall handfuls of saving truth, and drop seasonable words in the path of anxious ones. Happy service! No work on earth is more honourable than this, or more far-reaching in results, to encourage and feed the souls on which the Son of God has lifted His countenance and bestowed His love. But you who are an hungered, must yourself glean and beat out the corn. Give attention to reading, take heed how and what you hear, go on with the servants and handmaids of the Lord, and put forth every effort to profit in the word of righteousness. In vain shall handfuls be dropped in your path

if your eyes are heavy, or your hands idle. It is shameful to have, after a day's gleanings, only a few straggling ears and half-empty stalks in your hand, when you might have had an ephah of barley, or of the finest of the wheat, full measure, pressed down, and running over. When you hear divine truth, gather it into your memory and heart, then take it home and beat it out by meditation, and divide it with any sad-hearted Naomi in godly conversation; yet speak not so much of the corn as of the Man in the field—not of men as of the servants there, but of the Lord of the harvest. Joyful news! He is near of kin to us, partaker of our flesh and blood, our *Goël*, who ever lives.

The next step of the soul coming to assured confidence, is to draw near to the Kinsman himself. Like Ruth you must have rest, and this is not a question of gleanings and beating. But how shall you approach Him? how commend yourself to Him? Learn of Ruth. Take nothing in your hand, go poor and needy as you are, and lie down at His feet. He rests from His labour. That *you* may have rest, cease from your own works, and commit yourself to Him. No fear that He will resent it as a presumptuous liberty, or in any wise cast you out.

"Who art thou? I am Ruth, thine handmaid. My very name is of Moab, and I am poor and desolate. I have nothing—thou art rich and great, protect me—for thine is the right to redeem." So should you say, "Lord Jesus, I am a sinner, poor and desolate, but I am at Thy feet; it is mine to trust in Thee, it is Thine to redeem."

The mind of Christ towards such suppliants, is full of kindness and encouragement. Suffer the little children to come unto Me; suffer the weary and heavy-laden to come

unto Me; suffer the gleaners, the inquirers, who have not obtained peace, to come unto Me that I may give them rest.

Lie down till the morning. Our Lord will train you to put faith in His word of promise—be still, and according to your faith it shall be done to you. If only you believe Him in the night and darkness, when the morning breaks you shall have first-fruits of His love poured into the veil of your humility, without money, and without price. Your struggle is over; the Lord will play the part of the kinsman, because He is faithful that promised, and all that makes the name of Jesus worthy, and clothes His character with beauty and force, impels Him to do as He has said. Sit still, my daughter! you have six measures of barley at once, as an earnest of your inheritance, and because you have lain at the feet of Jesus, you shall dwell in His house for ever.

Now are you near to the joy of union, and the rest of perfect confidence. But you must be past all other help. If another will redeem, let him redeem; if there be a law by which you can be made righteous, let the law save you. But the Law will never save you or give you rest. The “other kinsman” could do well enough with the land, but when Ruth herself was mentioned, he drew back. The Law has no provision for the person of a poor sinner. So the Living One takes up your case, and the claims of the Law upon you are publicly ended in the court of Justice, so as never to be renewed. Now Jesus Christ is your Redeemer; and not only your inheritance is redeemed by Him, but yourself also.

Then marriage, and no more poverty, for all things are

yours, and you are Christ's ; and no more death, for Christ has risen from the dead, and you are quickened with Him. What glorious grace is this ! You have eternal redemption, indissoluble union, and continual access to the fullness of Christ.

" 'Tis done, the great transaction 's done,  
I am my Lord's, and He is mine ;  
He drew me, and I followed on,  
Charmed to confess the voice Divine.  
Happy day ! Happy day !  
When Jesus washed my sins away !"

## I. SAMUEL.

WHAT we call First and Second Samuel form one book of the Hebrew Bible. It is only since the sixteenth century that the division into two books has been marked in Hebrew, to correspond with the division in the Greek and Latin versions, which our English version has followed. In those old versions, First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings are entitled, "The Four Books of Kings." By whom the name of Samuel was given to the first and second of these, we know not. It is not a very appropriate or sufficient title even for the first book, and with the second it has no connection at all.

The contents of the narrative before us are very diversified, and full of interest for the archæologist and psychologist, as well as for those who read with a view to spiritual edification. It gives us history, with all the personal charms of biography superadded. The three chief personages are, Samuel, Saul, and David; and about these three, the history, which covers about 120 years, may be conveniently grouped.

I. SAMUEL.—This famous man, like Moses, is made known to us from his birth. It was a time of great



disorder and depression. The high priest, Eli, seems to have acted as judge, or chief magistrate—a new thing in the Theocracy, which did not put civil or political power into the hands of priests. His character was feeble; evils were not repressed, and the times were out of joint. The sons of the high priest were rapacious and debauched, “exemplars,” as one has remarked, “of the grasping and worldly clergy of all ages.” At such a time was Samuel born in Ramah. He was given in answer to his mother’s prayer—that mother, herself endowed with the prophetic spirit, and pouring out her grateful heart in a hymn which is one of the finest Hebrew lyrics, and which anticipates the song of the blessed Virgin Mary.

In tender youth, Samuel waited on the high priest in the sacred tent at Shiloh. And every one knows the touching story of the child waking at night and hearing his Maker’s voice. “Speak,” at length he answered, “for Thy servant heareth.” And a stern message it was that he received for the high priest, foreshadowing, indeed, the somewhat severe character that was to mark this prophet’s future ministry. A fine touch, surely, of biographical skill, to show us Samuel, first, a grave sweet child, “girded with a linen ephod,” before he is portrayed in his manhood, controlling all Israel with ease, and making the haughty Saul tremble in his presence.

The doom of Eli’s house was fulfilled. The young priests died in battle with the Philistines, and their father fell back in grief at the tidings that the ark, which they defended, had fallen into the hands of the uncircumcised; so he brake his neck and died. It was a dark day for Israel; the house of God that was in Shiloh was broken

up; "God forsook the tabernacle in Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men, and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand; their priests fell by the sword."\* A child was then named Ichabod, because the glory had departed from Israel, and the ark of God was taken.

At this crisis, Samuel rose to his great position, second only to that of Moses, in shaping the course of Israel. Not by warlike exploits, but by force of moral and spiritual character, he acquired and wielded undisputed authority, and judged Israel at Mizpeh. He was of Levitical origin, had been brought up at the tabernacle, and was entitled to offer sacrifice, but he laid no great emphasis on rites of religion, and let the ark, after its restoration, lie for twenty years at Kirjath-Jearim. His influence was based on his acknowledged character as a seer who discerned, and a prophet who interpreted and uttered the Divine Will. On king and people alike he pressed the duty of obedience, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams." His ministry was not in vain in the Lord, for under his guidance Israel renounced idolatry, and shook off the yoke of the Philistines.

All through life, this remarkable man maintained his lofty tone and sacred influence, and in his old age could challenge all Israel, to point out a single instance in which he had used his authority for selfish or unrighteous ends. But his sons were not like him; and the elders of Israel, seeing them unworthy of the succession, and fearing lest, at Samuel's death, the country should relapse into the state of feebleness and disorder out of which he had raised

\* Ps. lxxviii. 61-64.

it, proposed that they should have a king, like the nations round about. The project was not of faith, and Samuel entered his protest against it, on the score of its disloyalty and ingratitude to God. Nevertheless, the desire was granted, and the Lord caused it to issue for His glory in the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of His Anointed.

As in the commonwealth, so in the kingdom, Samuel continued to be revered as the seer, pronouncing on moral and spiritual questions, and maintaining the law and authority of Jehovah. He anointed the first king and the second; the political power which he had wielded he surrendered, without a murmur, to the new head of the state, taking care, however, to exact from the monarchy constitutional guarantees. This done, Samuel retired from the front of the history, and died where he was born, at Ramah, his last years being saddened by the unworthiness of king Saul, fulfilling his own worst misgivings at the time when the elders first asked for a king. Altogether, we take him to have been, with the sole exception of Moses, the greatest man Israel had yet produced;—a patriot, a statesman, an upright ruler, a prophet of righteousness, one who feared the face of neither king nor people, because he was upright and true to God. His ministry began and ended with stern messages, the first, in his childhood, to declare the rejection of the high priest and his sons; the last, in his old age, to declare the rejection of the king. In the latter case, however, Samuel's grief was relieved by his knowledge of the Divine purpose, that David, the Bethlehemite, should survive the envy of Saul, and reign in place of the rejected one.

II. SAUL.—Saul is a character, not without a certain moody splendour that fascinates, but with glaring faults, almost from the outset of his career; and, toward the close, a mournful deterioration, resulting in a tragical fate.

He first appears as a young man of unusual stature, and of that prepossessing appearance and impressive port, which delight the eye of the multitude. When called to the throne, he appeared to shrink from the post of honour; but he soon acquitted himself well in the kingly employment of war, cheerfully put his life in jeopardy, and with a certain vehement courage, rescued the city of Jabesh-Gilead from the Ammonites who surrounded it. After this exploit, the national voice enthusiastically confirmed him in the kingdom. It was a day of fair promise. The young king bore himself with a royal clemency toward those who objected to his elevation. Good impulses from the Spirit of God had, before this time, fallen on Saul. But, alas! the Spirit of God did not dwell in him, and soon the defects of his mind and heart began to appear. Samuel, who behaved to him with kindness and deference, could not conceal his misgivings, and said to the people, "If ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

In fact, Saul had only reigned two years when he began to fall away before God. At Gilgal he betrayed an unquiet, impatient heart, and assumed the part that belonged to Samuel, on which the prophet warned him that he had "done foolishly." Thereafter, when his son Jonathan, one of the most attractive persons in the whole history of Israel, and singularly free of his father's jealous temper,

had, by a sudden attack on the Philistines, gained an advantage which soon developed into a general and decisive victory, Saul, in consequence of a rash word which he had spoken, would have repeated the harshness of Jephthah, and put his princely son to death; but the army prevented the crime—"the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not."

The king continued to fight in his wild half-heathen manner, turning hither and thither, and "vexing all his enemies on every side." But he did not please the Lord or promote the Divine purposes for which Israel had been separated from the nations. The final test of his obedience was taken in a war which he waged with the Amalekites. He bore himself rather as a self-willed captain than as the executioner of a Divine judgment, and was rejected for his disobedience and the equivocation with which he tried to conceal his fault from the prophet Samuel.

Then he waxed worse and worse. Wild passions shook him, with fierce spasms of conscience and dark moods of jealousy.\* He fell into melancholy, and his courtiers trembled before him as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand and an evil spirit brooding over him. His very courage seems to have dwindled, for when the Philistine giant defied the army of Israel, the king, who had been admired for his stature and strength, and whose

\* "My heart now never beats up heavenward.  
Once was I as a bird that took slight soars :  
Now never mounts my soul above the ground,  
I have no Godward movings now : no God  
Now, from His genial seat of light remote,  
Sends down to me a ray."

—*Saul : a Drama.* Part I.; Act 5; Scene 1.

armour no ordinary man could wear, appears to have shrunk from the encounter. Worse still, he was capable of ingratitude and peevish jealousy toward the brave youth who delivered Israel. He sought his life in the palace and in the field, and hunted him as a partridge on the mountains. At every step the path of Saul now seemed to darken. He became restless, capricious, tyrannical. He cruelly devastated the city of the priests, slaying eighty-five of their number in cold blood. Good men fell away from his side, and such wretches as Doeg, the Edomite, obtained influence over him.\* Once and again, indeed, he seemed to relent, and a gleam of better feeling shot across his soul, as when David had generously spared his life, and he said, "Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." But it was only a passing gleam, soon lost again in the blackness of this tragedy. At last the king sunk beneath his own self-respect, and had recourse to evil ways which he himself had condemned. He had expelled necromancers from the land, but learning that one resided at Endor, he stealthily consulted her. If he had been told, at the beginning of his reign, that he would himself repair for help to one of those who professed communication with the dead, he would have repelled the thought with indignation. But he was a man of that spiritual temperament which, if it cannot get communication from what is above, will take it from beneath rather than have none. "And Saul was sore dis-

\* "Doeg, who for our priests no reverence knows,  
Fell on them with a double-handed sword,  
Like a strong thresher on a heap of corn,  
And cut them up in pieces."

*Saul a Drama* Part III.; Act 4; Scene 10.



tressed because he had no message from God by prophets or by dreams." The scene at Endor is mysterious, and is best left in shadow. Plainly, there ensued more than the woman was prepared for, and to her eyes an apparition of an aged prophet was visible, while the terrified king heard a voice. Saul leaped to the conclusion that it was Samuel; but this we reckon very improbable, both because we cannot suppose that the rest of the blessed is disturbed by the call of necromancers, and because of the nature of the address delivered to Saul, which contains no tone of pity, or exhortation to repentance, or word of kindly counsel, but only upbraidings for the past, and gloomy prediction of death to-morrow, to drive the monarch to despair.

And so it ended with despair and death. On the mountains of Gilboa, Saul perished by his own hand. Mark how his sin found him out. As his first offence was committed in impatience to begin a contest with the Philistines, he died in battle with the Philistines; and as his second offence, as king, was disobedience in war with the Amalekites, it was an Amalekite who brought his crown and bracelets, in vindictive triumph, to David. A sad history! It had been better for that man that he had never been born. But a most useful history too, for there are tragedies in common life where the brightest hopes are ruined by a wilful, haughty spirit. As in nature, so in human life, there are easy slopes down which, if one let himself roll, he may fall over a hidden precipice and never rise again.

III. DAVID.—We come to a star of the first magni-



tude—the sweet singer of Israel—the hero of many combats—the man who drew friendship and admiration after him wherever he moved—the king whom God exalted “to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.”

Like Abel and Joseph, David was in youth a keeper of sheep, and his secluded life in the fields tended, no doubt, to enrich the poetic soul within him, as well as to exercise his vigilance and daring. While watching his father's flocks by night, he looked up to the heavens—the work of God's fingers,—the moon and the stars which He had ordained, and as he led the sheep in right paths unto green pastures, and drove away the robbers and beasts of prey, he sung of the Lord his Shepherd, and was trained in faith and patience for his own future career as the shepherd-king of Israel.

The prophet Samuel anointed him privately at Bethlehem, and the Spirit of the Lord, departing from Saul, came upon David; but he did not reach the throne without a long experience of vicissitude and rejection. Summoned to court to play before the king, and relieve his morbid melancholy, David gained at once the favour of Saul, and was made armour-bearer, or equerry to the king. He bore well his sudden promotion, strong in the very point of character in which Saul was so weak. Patient and self-controlled, he snatched at no honour, and never entered into any plot against the unhappy monarch. Indeed, he quietly retired from the court to the sheep-cotes of Bethlehem, and waited there till God's Providence called him forth.

The story of the single combat with Goliath is one of the most romantic ever written, and casts an undying

charm about the gallant Bethlehemite. In the conflict, we see no miraculous element, but on David's part a fine combination of faith in God, with the careful use of the best weapons and skill he possessed. Having faith in God, the young champion kept a perfect self-possession, and taking the right weapons for assailing the giant at a distance, and knowing how to use them, he gained the day. David's sling was to him as a rifle, and sent the smooth stone—the bullet of the period—crashing through the giant's forehead, before he, with his utmost strides, could come to close quarters. At the end of the fight, all the army of Israel shouted, but one hears no shout from David—sees no vaunting in him, for a man who walks or fights in faith can never boast himself as they do who walk or fight after the flesh.

After this victory, there could be no return to the sheep-cotes. David at once became, and ever after continued to be, a prominent public man. He had great trials and risks, but he had a peculiar solace in the generous love of the crown prince Jonathan. Of all men, Jonathan had most to fear from David's advancement, but his character admitted no stain of selfishness, and he loved him "as his own soul." The friends were knit together by congeniality of disposition,—both in the bloom of youth,—both adventurous and brave, and better still, both fearers of Jehovah, taking no pleasure in the court of the wild, unhappy Saul. In this power of attracting and retaining enthusiastic friendship, David suggests to us Jesus Christ his son, who is dearer to His own than life itself, and is such a Beloved and such a Friend that it is no loss, but gain, to renounce everything for Him.

Then David's history moves on, through distinction, peril, friendship, war, love, marriage, narrow escapes, concealment in dens and caves of the earth, wanderings in the wilderness of Judah, and even the life of a refugee among the Philistines. It was a time of discipline and affliction, suggesting the rejection and humiliation of the Son of David before He was exalted. But David was not harmless and undefiled as the holy Jesus was. At times his faith was clouded, and clouded faith led, as it always leads, to fluctuating counsels and questionable conduct. With all his faults, however, full in view, we recognise in David, throughout the history, a man of God in preparation for a higher trust,—one who cannot be extinguished or pushed aside,—patient, skilful, ready for emergencies, magnanimous,—the master-spirit of his time.

Saul precedes David. Confusion, failure, pride going before destruction, and the haughty spirit before a fall—these are the attempts of the flesh to set up a kingdom. Their end is catastrophe, as it was with the reign of Saul, as it will be with the reign of Antichrist. The kingdom of David follows. There seems to be long delay in setting it up, but when it does come, it will be established for ever. Now Saul began with applause of men, and ended with rejection from God. David began with rejection by men, and then had the kingdom given him by God. It is the way of Christ. He was rejected, and therefore is exalted. True that His authority is disputed and refused by the spirit of Saul-like darkness and confusion on the earth, but in the end God will give to Him the throne of His father David. Let us follow Him in the rejection, in the hold at Engedi, and the wilderness at Judah, and we

shall stand in His court, and see His face, when He comes to the kingdom and reigns before His ancients gloriously. The Gentiles who attend Him from Gath of the Philistines, shall yet come to Jerusalem.

“There is the throne of David,  
And there from care released,  
The song of them that triumph,—  
The shout of them that feast.  
And they who with their Leader  
Have conquered in the fight,  
For ever and for ever  
Are clad in robes of white.”

## II. SAMUEL.

THIS book, originally one with 1 Samuel, continues and almost concludes the life of David. He is the central figure throughout. Round him are grouped many remarkable men, but no one of those times makes such an impression on us as David himself, through the force of his character, the versatility of his mind, and the variety of incidents and experience through which he passed. The narrative is worthy of its place in the canon of Scripture, not only for its biography of this great king, but also for its intimations of Messiah to come, its practical teachings concerning the way of patience and faith, and its piercing exposure of the lustings of the flesh, which war against the soul. There are fascinating passages in the book, and splendid bursts of poetry, but there are pages that we read with pain and shame, for the ways of David in prosperity were not so close with God as in the earlier days when he bore the yoke in his youth.

The story opens with his generous lament over the death of Saul and his friend Jonathan. Had he been a selfish aspirant after power, he would have exulted, but his patriotism was too sincere to hear of a defeat of Israel without grief, and he had a feeling of kindness even for

Saul whom he ever regarded as the Lord's anointed. Much more for Jonathan, "Woe is me for thee, my brother Jonathan!" The elegy of David on this occasion is the first poem of the kind on record, and to the present day, none has appeared to surpass it in beauty.

He that believes need not make haste, and David did not spring at the vacant throne. His first care was to find a city for his armed men and their families, because Ziklag had been burned. Inquiring of the Lord, and following His direction, he marched into the territory of his own tribe, and settled his followers in and around Hebron. There the men of Judah anointed and proclaimed him king. His first step was to send a conciliatory message to the adherents of the house of Saul on the East of the Jordan. But Abner, the captain of Saul's host, proclaimed Ishbosheth, a son of the late king, and succeeded in retaining, in allegiance to him, not only the land of Gilead, but the powerful tribe of Ephraim, and the vigorous sons of Asher and Benjamin also. It seemed as if David would never reach the dignity for which he had been in youth anointed by Samuel, for seven years and a half ran on, and he was still no more than king or chief of Judah in Hebron.

Civil war broke out, and the house of David steadily gained on the house of Saul. At last Abner saw that he could no longer prop up the throne of Ishbosheth, a prince of feeble character, quite unfit to be a rival to the son of Jesse. He therefore seized an opportunity of quarrel, went over to the side of the King of Judah, and by his open defection virtually settled the political question of the day. But the time was stained with deeds of treacherous cruelty.

Abner was murdered by Joab, a relative and distinguished officer of King David, partly out of revenge for the slaying of Joab's youngest brother by Abner in battle, and partly out of jealousy, lest this experienced captain should have military rank above himself, in the national army. Ishbosheth too was assassinated in his bed by two ruffians, who thought to ingratiate themselves with David by the deed, but both the deeds were abhorred by David's soul. The king lamented over Abner, and forced Joab to walk as a mourner in sackcloth at the funeral. The murderers of Ishbosheth were treated like the Amalekite who had boasted of slaying Saul his father; they were sternly put to death.

By universal consent, David was now proclaimed King of all Israel, and for the third time the holy oil was poured upon his head. He was in the prime of life—thirty-seven—a very lion of the tribe of Judah. His first act was to choose Jerusalem as the capital, and to wrest it from the Jebusites, who thought their city so impregnable that it could be defended by the blind and the lame. Joab scaled it, and the old seat of Melchizedec became the city of David: "So David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him." Under him the monarchy took a far wider range and firmer root than under Saul. The dominion was extended by many conquests. The court and camp were carefully organised. The internal government of the realm was put under the charge of proper officers. A commercial league, very favourable to Israel, was made with the Phenicians, and the fame and influence of the Hebrew King spread over all the East. There was no rival power of much influence, for, as monumental evidence shows, both Egypt and Assyria were at the time exceptionally weak and quiet.



David now saw around him faithful prophets, wise counsellors, gallant captains, a disciplined army, a loyal people—all that a king would have. But he was at heart, and above all, a man of God, and these things could not content him, while the ark of the Lord was in obscurity, and the religious worship in confusion or neglect. So he resolved to move the ark from Kirjath-Jearim, where it lay, to the new capital. To mark the greatness of the occasion he went at the head of thirty thousand men to the forest-city, and found the sacred ark in the house of Abinadab. But the expedition came to a sorry end. The ark was most improperly set on a car after the manner of the heathen. This was the first error, and it led to a second. One of the young Levites in attendance presumptuously put his hand on the ark to steady it, when the car shook. Suddenly he fell dead. At once the joy of the day was turned to mourning. The voice of psalms with instruments of music, ceased. The king, always quick in his feelings, was greatly agitated, changed his purpose, and brought the ark no farther, but committed it to the pious care of Obed-edom, the Gittite.

After three months, David recurred to his plan of fetching the ark to Jerusalem, and took care to have it carried by the Levites on poles according to the law. In person, he led the triumphal procession or dance. So the solemn transfer was accomplished, and the gates and doors of Jerusalem were lifted up, that the King of glory might come in. It was one of the grandest days in David's eventful life. Full of faith and joy, he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and blessed the people. At evening he returned to the palace to bless his household.

But there, an uncongenial spirit encountered him. Michal, the wife of his youth, retained the spirit of Saul, her father, in David's house. Instead of being a helper of his joy, she scoffed at his fervour, and therefore was doomed to childlessness. It is the fate which attends those churches and individuals, in every age, who deride enthusiasm and holy excitation of soul. They may not die, but they are doomed to barrenness.

The next thought of the king was to erect a temple, in which the ark should be preserved; but it was intimated to him through the prophet Nathan, that this should be the work of his son. At the same time God promised to make him a house, and establish his throne for ever. This was the covenant promise, on which David, and all the men of faith, relied—"the sure mercies of David," which the New Testament declares to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. "As concerning that he raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David."\*

The energies of the king, finding no scope in temple-building, returned to the terrible business of war. All the nations round about felt the edge of his sword, and were subdued, either by the hero-king himself, or by the relentless Joab who was to him what Sisera had been to Jabin, or Abner to Saul. War is a cruel occupation in every age, and it is not concealed that the wars of David were conducted in the severe and vengeful temper of those times in the East, with fire as well as sword, shocking torture of captives, and savage extermination of families.

Yet it had been better for David that he had remained

\* Acts xiii. 34.

at the head of his army, than tarry at Jerusalem as he did while Rabbah was besieged by Joab. It was then that he fell into shameful sin, from which indeed God in mercy restored his soul, but from which it is impossible to cleanse his tarnished reputation. No right-thinking man can read the unvarnished narrative without horror and grief. True, that we must not judge David by the light of our own time or country. What he committed was just the kind of crime most usual with eastern monarchs, and David had nothing of the austerity of a Christian hero-king, an Alfred, or a St. Louis, or a Gustavus Adolphus. He had always allowed himself indulgence which the moral sense of Christian times forbids. Nevertheless, it was a terrible fall for the man who restored the worship of God and wrote so many songs of Zion, and had resolved to walk within his house with a perfect heart, to commit adultery, and then bring the guilt of deceit and murder on his soul.

For a while he seemed to prosper in his sin. Happy in his ignorance, Uriah died as a soldier dies. The beautiful Bathsheba became David's wife, and bore him a son whom he passionately loved. His conscience seems to have slept secure, but "the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

Well for the king that the Lord did not let him alone, but sent to him Nathan, His servant. Appearing suddenly in the royal presence, the prophet seemed to claim redress for a poor man who had suffered wrong. It was the true mission of a prophet, and the king hearkened with interest. Then Nathan spoke that apologue of the poor man and his ewe lamb, which cannot be surpassed in tender and exquisite beauty. The monarch heard, and with his moral

sense as quick as ever in regard to others, though torpid in reference to himself, condemned the selfishness of that rich man who spared his own flock and seized the solitary pet-lamb of his poor neighbour. Then came Nathan's opportunity. With undaunted look he pronounced the tremendous words—"Thou art the man!"—and pressed on David's conscience, not so much his licentiousness, as the meanness and selfishness of his sin against Uriah. The king recognised the rebuke of God. His sin had found him out; his soul was cleft with conviction, and bowed down in an agony of shame. When at last his lips moved, he extenuated nothing, pleaded no palliation, laid no part of the fault upon another, but simply said, "I have sinned against Jehovah!" Against Uriah indeed he had done wrong; but this was his deepest distress, the sin against the Lord. Pent up in his own bosom, in silence and secrecy, this sin would have ruined David, but, ingenuously confessed and repented of, it was forgiven, and that at once. Nathan said, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." Well might David write, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. . . . I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."\*

At the same time, where there is no condemnation, there may yet be much correction from iniquity; and from this period of his life David tasted bitter sorrow, especially domestic sorrow, because his sin had been domestic sin. The child of Bathsheba died. Then very shocking crimes broke out among the elder children of the king. The lovely Tamar—"The Palm Tree"—Absalom's sister, was

\* Ps. xxxii. 1-5.

dishonoured. Amnon, her half brother, the eldest son of the monarch, and heir-apparent to the throne, was for this outrage slain by the retainers of Absalom.

The last-named prince united, to a most prepossessing exterior, an unscrupulous temper and a vain heart. Treated by David with partiality, he ill-requited his father's love. When restored from the exile to which he had been forced on the assassination of the prince Amnon, he took measures to supplant and dethrone the now aged king. The time was well chosen for his purpose. David's moral influence over his subjects had been weakened by the state of his family and the stain of his heinous sin. The tribe of Ephraim had always been somewhat jealous of the arrangement by which the Chief of Judah had become their king; and the friends of Saul's dynasty in Benjamin, and on the other side of Jordan, fostered the dissatisfaction. With the people of Judah, Absalom took pains to ingratiate himself, and when his measures were ripe, seized on Hebron, raised a formidable revolt, and gathered a large army. Though he was himself a man rather of impetuous will than of cool judgment, he had the great advantage of having at his right hand, as counsellor, Ahithophel, apparently the grandfather of Bathsheba,\* and reputed to be the most astute man in the nation.

At this trying emergency the character of David shone again with something like the lustre of his happier days. He was devout, resigned, generous, unselfish, yet wise and wary too. He left Jerusalem surrounded by his faithful guards, the Cherethites, Pelethites, and Gittites, and at-

\* 2 Sam. xi. 3 ; xxiii. 34.

tended by his most gallant officers, Joab and Abishai, Benaiah and Ittai. Hushai, his "friend," did him a great service in affecting to support Absalom, and defeating the shrewd counsel of Ahithophel, who, in wounded pride, abandoned the rebel camp and committed suicide.

At last the royal and the rebel armies met beyond Jordan. In the decisive battle which ensued, the troops of Absalom out-numbered those of David, but they were entangled in the woods, and routed with great slaughter. The rebel prince himself miserably died. Joab, who had reconciled him to his father after Amnon's death, was resolved that there should be no second reconciliation, and, disregarding the charge of the king to spare the life of his son, consulted only the good of the state, and thus, in his stern fashion, finished the matter. "He took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, whilst he was yet alive, in the midst of the oak; and ten young men, that bare Joab's armour, compassed about and smote Absalom and slew him. And they took Absalom and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him. Now Absalom, in his lifetime, had taken, and reared up for himself, a pillar, which is in the king's dale, for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance, and he called the pillar after his own name, and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place."\* In all ages, the Jews have thrown stones, with execrations, on Absalom's tomb. But king David mourned for his son with all the intensity of his nature, "Would God I had died for thee! O Absalom! my son! my son!"

\* 2 Sam. xviii. 14-18.



Then we read of the restoration of the king, and recognize in him the same mixture of generosity and forbearance with policy and energy, that marked him all through life. He showed clemency to Shimei, the Benjamite, who had cursed him in his flight, and now grovelled before him in his triumph. He expressed the utmost gratitude to the fine old Gileadite, Barzillai, for his kindness in the time of need. He received Mephibosheth, the lame son of Jonathan, and admitted the explanation which he gave of his apparent disloyalty; but, as we read the story, scarcely did him all the justice he deserved. His throne, indeed, was not yet out of danger, and his mind was troubled. The jealousy of Israel, *i.e.*, of the tribes led by Ephraim, broke out anew against Judah; and at a critical moment, Sheba, another of the turbulent tribe of Benjamin, blew the trumpet of revolt, and drew away the people from David. Now the king had so far resented the conduct of Joab, in slaying Absalom, that he had deprived him of his command, and appointed, in his stead, Amasa, Joab's cousin, who had served as general in the rebel army. This Amasa, he sent to gather the men of Judah, in order to suppress at once the new rebellion. But Joab would not thus be superseded, and gave another proof of his fierce temper and relentless resolution. Embracing his kinsman, Amasa, he assassinated him, as, many years before, he had struck down Abner. Then, resuming the command, he quickly brought the rebellion to an end, and returned triumphant to Jerusalem. David felt that this son of Zeruiah was too strong for him, and retained him as captain of the host.

The last story in this book shows how the site of the



future temple was secured. The king numbered his people in such a spirit that the Lord was displeased. A terrible pestilence came on the land, and brooded over Jerusalem. David saw, in vision, the destroying angel stretching out his hand over the capital, and he confessed his sin, and cried to the Lord. Gad, the seer, came to him from the Lord, with instructions to rear an altar and offer sacrifice at the spot where he beheld the vision. It was the thrashing-floor of Araunah, without the city wall of that period, on the east side. This Araunah represented the Jebusites, the old inhabitants of Jerusalem, and is called "the king."\* When David requested possession of the ground, this Jebusite chief generously presented it to him. The king insisted, however, on paying for it, and prevailed. Then the altar was reared, and the plague was stayed. The spot and all around became sacred soil. There the Temple was built by Solomon; and the site of Araunah's thrashing-floor is recognised at this day with almost idolatrous veneration, under the Mussulman "Dome of the Rock."

Almost at the end of the history, we find two songs of David, noble specimens of his poetic genius. The 22d chapter is an ode of triumph after deliverance out of the hands of enemies, and is almost exactly the same as the 18th Psalm. In chapter xxiii., we have the last poem of the Son of Jesse, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. He was conscious of something higher and better than genius. The Spirit of the Lord so spake into him, that the word on his tongue was the word of the Spirit. Then he sang of the ideal of a just reign, and the advent, in his own line, of a

\* 2 Sam. xxiv. 23.

righteous and prosperous Ruler over men ; for though his house was not with God as it ought to have been, the covenant was well ordered and sure. He prophesied also the doom of the wicked who should oppose the Just One. And in all this, David, being a prophet, sang not so much of Solomon or of Hezekiah, as of a Greater than these, that Just One, born in Bethlehem, who is called the Son of David, and of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

The history, as we have seen, is crowded with characters. It would be pleasant to dwell on the lowly love of Mephibosheth ; the tried friendship of Ittai ; the holy fidelity of Nathan ; the lofty courage of Benaiah and the heroes ; the patriarchal kindness of Barzillai ; and the princely courtesy of Araunah, the last, not least, of the Jebusites. It might be useful, too, to gather warnings from Joab's deeds of blood ; Amnon's intemperate passion ; Absalom's base ambition ; and Shimei's violence and meanness. But the great lessons come to us from David himself, around whom, as a centre, all these characters revolved,—David, one of the rarest men in history, prophet, poet, warrior, ruler, saint and sinner, a man of sorrows, and yet a man of the brightest qualities, and of the most devout joy in God.

He sets forth Christ in his wars—going forth conquering and to conquer ; and Christ in his psalms, the man of suffering and the king of glory. But as a man, David is disabled by the shadow on his history, from being a full type of Christ. He is all the nearer to us :—he touches our life, who are sinners, and by such psalms as the 51st, shows us, when we have sinned, how to pray. David sinned against the Lord, but the Son of David “did no

iniquity, neither was guile found in his mouth." The Lord bless to us the warning of David's life, and the example of Christ's life, with the admonition of the holy apostle, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity!"

## I. KINGS.

FIRST and Second Kings formed in Hebrew one book, like First and Second Samuel. The division was made in the Greek and Latin versions, with which the modern English Bibles are arranged to correspond. Though not written by the same pen as the Books of Samuel, these of the Kings are obviously intended as a continuation of the history, and this continuity is expressed by the secondary titles in our English Bibles, following the titles in the Vulgate. These four Books of Kings furnish a consecutive narrative of the Hebrew monarchy from its rise to its downfall.

The tradition is that our two Books of Kings were written by Jeremiah the prophet, and it is probably true. There is a strong similarity in style to the acknowledged writings of that prophet; and the time in which Jeremiah prophesied agrees well with the supposition, for this history must have been written by one who lived in the period of the captivity at the end of the kingdom, and yet by one who did not survive the captivity, since there is no hint at the conclusion of a restoration from Babylon. We have a separate and independent record of the same times in the Books of Chronicles, but these are not so ancient as the Books of Kings, and in the Hebrew Scripture occupied

quite another position, and lie at the very end of the Canon.

The chief matters in 1 Kings are the reign of Solomon, the division of the kingdom into two at his death, and the ministry in the northern kingdom of the prophet Elijah.

I. The reign of David was troubled to the last. Though he was no more than seventy years of age, the adventurous and agitated life through which he had passed had so worn out the great king, that he was feeble, and needed constant nursing. His weakness encouraged disorder, and still the trouble came out of his own house. A favourite son, Adonijah, tried to seize the regal position, to prevent the succession of Solomon. The priest Abiathar counselled him, and, strange to say, Joab, faithful to David during a long life of military service, went over to Adonijah's interest. He meant it, indeed, not against David, but against Solomon, whose accession he for some reason disliked. The aged king, however, was made aware of the plot by his old friend and adviser, Nathan the prophet, and he soon showed that the old energy was still within him. If the lion of the tribe of Judah was sick, he was a lion still. Assuring the queen Bathsheba that he would secure her son's succession, he caused the faithful captain Benaiah, with Nathan, to take the young prince Solomon, and Zadok the priest to pour the anointing oil upon his head, and immediately with blasts of trumpets to proclaim him king. It was done; and Adonijah's party, panic-struck with this promptitude, fled in all directions. The danger was past, "and David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David."

The kingdom of Solomon was peace, but his accession was marked by severities. Adonijah, spared at first, was, through his indiscreet ambition, condemned and slain. Abiathar, last of Eli's house, was deposed. Joab, who had killed so many in fair fight, and at least two great soldiers by foul treachery, was put to death. Shimei, too, the bitter partisan of the house of Saul, was "interned," as the phrase now is, at Jerusalem, and going beyond the bounds, was executed. So perished all Solomon's enemies, and his kingdom was established in peace. So shall the enemies of Christ perish from the way, that His reign of peace may be established, and the righteous flourish in His days. The writer describes David as charging his son from his sick-bed to put these men to death, and attributes to the aged king cruel and vengeful language, evidently unconscious that this would hurt the sensibilities of any who should ever read this book. So far was the spirit of those times from the gentle and forgiving tone of Christ.

The characteristics of Solomon as a king were wisdom, justice, and magnificence.

*Wisdom* he asked of God, and obtained a wise and understanding heart. He seems to have had a singularly comprehensive mind, that could take pleasure in many studies, a very wide power of observation and reflection, a strong grasp of all the great problems of human life, and "largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore." He was the first man of science in his nation, and though his works on natural history have not been preserved, because they were foreign to the purposes of the Bible, yet all wise and reverent astronomers, botanists, and zoologists may fairly be reckoned as followers of Solomon.

On the gravest themes that occupy the mind, "he was wiser than all men," even the famous Idumeans of the East, and the equally famed scholars of Egypt. Like all men of a full mind, he delighted to communicate, and poured himself out in three thousand proverbs, and songs a thousand and five. He also excelled in witty and piercing conversation, and such was the reputation of the royal sage, that "there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom."\* One sovereign, indeed, was not content to send an embassy. The Queen of Sheba, herself a lover of wisdom, came in state to Jerusalem; and, when the king answered all her questions, she was astonished at his wisdom, even more than at his magnificence.

The *justice* of Solomon was of the greatest benefit to his kingdom. It was held to be one of the first duties of a sovereign to sit in judgment, and his decisions were guided by a righteous purpose and a consummate discretion. At the very beginning of his reign, his penetration was evinced in deciding between two mothers who contended for a child. It was his doctrine that "the king's throne shall be established in righteousness,"† and as was his doctrine, such was his practice,—judging the poor of the people, and delivering their souls from deceit and violence.

The *magnificence* of Solomon is vividly described. In his days the national wealth greatly increased. By marriage at an early age, he obtained a close alliance with the court of Egypt, and imported from that country horses and chariots. With the king of Tyre, an ally of his father David, he maintained the most friendly relations, got from

\* 1 Kings iv. 34.

† Prov. xxv. 5.



him architects and timber for his great works at Jerusalem, and even sent out merchant-fleets, manned principally by skilful Tyrian sailors. One of these went to Ophir, in the East, the other to Tarshish, in the West. Thus Solomon widened the minds of his people by communication with other countries and races, and astonished them with the gold, silver, ivory, and many other precious imports that his ships brought from afar. The internal administration of the kingdom was systematically conducted under proper officers, and though heavy taxation was incurred by the splendour of the court, and the vast public works undertaken, the continuance of peace and prosperity enabled the people to bear the burden. It is written in a tone of exultation, "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and making merry."\* The appointments of the palace were of the most costly description, vessels of gold, noble horses and chariots, a throne of ivory with a seat of gold, a palanquin of cedar with silver pillars and a golden floor, robes of such gorgeous beauty that when Christ would indicate the highest stretch of human splendour in appearance, He spoke of how "Solomon was arrayed in all his glory."

Like all monarchs with a taste for magnificence, Solomon was a great builder. Cities, towers, and palaces, rose at his command. By far his most important work, however, was the Temple in Jerusalem, erected on the site already purchased by king David. Phenician skill combined with the Hebrew industry in this great erection. The profuse ornamental work was entrusted to Hiram, an eminent sculptor and engraver, of mixed Israelite and Tyrian

\* 1 Kings iv. 20.

descent. All the dimensions were of course on a larger scale than those of the Tabernacle; but the general arrangement was preserved—the courts, then the Holy Place (lit by *ten* seven-branched lamps instead of *one*)—and then the Holy of Holies, where, in darkness and mystery, the ark of God rested between the figures of cherubim. It was the veritable ark that was constructed in the wilderness, and that still contained the stone tables of the Law, which was now brought into the place prepared for it. When all the work was finished, the Temple was dedicated with sacrifice, prayer, and praise, the king himself taking the prominent part in all the service. It is admirable to see how soberly he judged of his work, even in that day of exultation, and how clearly he perceived the insufficiency of any, even the most splendid edifice, to contain or enshrine the Almighty God. “Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?”\*

So far as we have traced his history, this king, in many points, suggests and prefigures Christ. David was active strength, Solomon, wisdom and peace; Christ is both power and wisdom, mighty Conqueror and Prince of peace. He is the King, reigning in righteousness, to the gates of whose Jerusalem the resources of all nations must be brought. All nations shall call Him blessed. From the West the kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring presents; from the East, the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Happy they who come to Him now, and hear His wisdom! A Greater than Solomon is here. In our “Prince of Peace” are hid “all treasures of wisdom and

\* 1 Kings viii. 27.

knowledge," good counsels for saints, words of salvation for sinners, and words in season for the weary. Let us remember the Queen of Sheba, and seek Him while He may be found, commune with Him of all that is in our hearts; He will receive us, He will answer the questions of an earnest spirit, He will grant us all our desires.

It must be added that the end of this king's history is very disappointing. As a man, Solomon is even more unfit than David to be a personal representative of the undefiled Saviour. Through the fatal institution of polygamy, his court was demoralised by foreign princesses and concubines; heathen rites of worship were introduced, and idolatrous altars rose hard by the Temple of Jehovah. Solomon began to be weak as other men. Falling from righteousness, he ceased to be a prince of peace, and the latter years of his reign were disturbed by adversaries. The Lord said that He would have rent the kingdom from him, were it not for David his father's sake.

II. The history casts no light of hope over the sad fall of Solomon, and leaves his fate uncertain. After his death, the old discord between Judah and Ephraim broke out again, and the son and successor of the wise man being a fool, a rupture of the kingdom was precipitated. Rehoboam retained only Judah, with a measure of support from Benjamin and Simeon. The other tribes renounced the house of David, and appointed as their king a vigorous young chief of the tribe of Ephraim, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. This prince, reviving the memory of the great Ephraimite, Joshua, the son of Nun, established his power at Shechem. Alas! he made Israel to sin by raising calves for worship

at Dan and Bethel. Having spent years of exile in Egypt, he represented, by the Egyptian image of the ox, the God who had brought up Israel out of the house of bondage. It was an exact repetition of the sin of Aaron and the tribes in the wilderness; and in both cases, the summons to worship the molten calf is expressed in precisely the same terms,—“Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!”\* The sin of Jeroboam proved the ultimate ruin of his kingdom. The professed worship of Jehovah under the form of golden images, led to the adoption of heathen rites and idols, and the evil consequence of this policy is traced and noted through the whole history of the northern kingdom. Every king, of whatever dynasty, who broke the first or second commandments of the divine law, “walked in the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, wherewith he made Israel to sin.”

The First Book of Kings gives scanty information of the small kingdom of Judah. Rehoboam had a long but inglorious reign. His son was like him—an unworthy prince. His grandson Asa, and great grandson Jehoshaphat, returned to the footsteps of David, and “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.”

Attention is principally turned to the northern kingdom, and its history is full of trouble and violence. The reigning house was not protected by any divine covenant like the family of David at Jerusalem, and the dynasty was frequently changed. Jeroboam’s son and all his descendants were ruthlessly slain by a chief of Issachar, named Baasha. Baasha’s son in turn was put to death by Zimri,

\* Exod. xxxii. 4; 1 Kings xii. 28.

one of his officers, and all his house destroyed. Zimri's usurpation lasted only one short week; and power fell into the hands of Omri, then at the head of the army. He departed further than any of the previous kings from the true worship and service of Jehovah, but he did one great thing for his kingdom in choosing the site of Samaria, and founding there a new capital.

The second of the Omri dynasty was a prince of evil fame, who married a Phenician princess of still more odious repute. Ahab was wicked, but not without some vein of good feeling. Jezebel was reckless, cruel, and licentious. She introduced the Phenician worship of Ashtoreth and Baal, and hunted down the prophets and worshippers of Jehovah in a bloody persecution.

III. It was at this crisis that one of the most striking figures in all the Old Testament appeared,—Elijah the Tishbite. While the priesthood was preserved in the kingdom of Judah, prophets were more prominent in that of Israel. The schools of the prophets at Ramah, Bethel, and Gilgal, were all within its boundaries. Ahijah and Shemaiah were prophets of mark in Jeroboam's reign. Elijah is introduced simply as one of the inhabitants of Gilead. Of his lineage and early nurture, we read not a word; but God had raised up that lofty spirit in the wilds on the east of the Jordan, to stand before the ruling wickedness of the time, and to bear witness to the truth signified by the name he bore, Elijah, that Jehovah was God.

There fell on the land a long and terrible drought. It had been predicted by Elijah, who during the time found

shelter, first by the brook Cherith, afterwards at Zarephath, a town of Zidon, in the house of a widow, whose child he restored to life. At the end of the time appointed for the drought, he returned into the land of Israel and confronted Ahab, not fearing the wrath of the king, but charging on his conscience his heavy sin in forsaking Jehovah and following Baalim. At his instance, the king summoned the prophets of Baal and the people to Mount Carmel. There the question of Jehovah or Baal was submitted to public ordeal, and in the result, the prophets of Baal having obtained no response, and the Lord answering Elijah's appeal by fire, the people fell on their faces and cried, "Jehovah, He is the God; Jehovah, He is the God." Then ensued death to the prophets of Baal, to insure the cessation of Baal-worship, and to fulfil the law of Moses which denounced capital punishment against any who enticed Israel to idolatry.\* The people had halted between two opinions, but the men who were put to death had no such hesitation;—they were the leaders of national apostasy, and the abettors of Jezebel, in cutting off the prophets of the Lord.

Having called down fire from heaven, Elijah next prayed for rain, and it fell in torrents. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months, and he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."†

The bravest men have their times of weakness and misgiving, and Elijah seems to have suffered from reaction,

\* Deut. xiii. 6-9.

† James v. 17, 18.



after his great encounter with the champions of Baal. Hearing of the wrath of the vindictive Jezebel, he fled for his life, and yet in the wilderness he wearied of his life, and desired that he might die. The Lord had great patience with His servant, and, after making terrors to pass by at the Mount Horeb, spoke to him in a still, small voice, and recalled him to public service. Elijah had been discouraged by the impression that he stood alone, so it was revealed to him that the Lord had preserved for himself seven thousand faithful ones, even in that dark time. And still further to cheer the prophet, he was permitted to have an attendant, who should be trained as his successor. This was Elisha, the son of Shaphat, whom the Tishbite abruptly summoned from the field where he was ploughing with oxen. Elisha gave a feast of farewell to his people; "then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

The book before us ends with the ruin of Ahab. He committed a great sin. Breaking the tenth commandment in coveting Naboth's vineyard, he succeeded in seizing it by breaking the ninth and sixth commandments, by false witness and murder. When he hesitated, Jezebel, the Clytemnestra and the Lady Macbeth of the story, supplied the lacking resolution, and carried through this wickedness. Ahab took possession of the vineyard, but his exultation was soon turned to fear, for he was suddenly confronted by Elijah, and heard, in plain words, the doom of himself, his queen, and all his house. The king's spirit was troubled. "He rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." But it was no deep or permanent change. When judgment was



taken off from Pharaoh, he was the same proud Pharaoh still, and when Ahab's terror had gone, he was the same wilful and cruel Ahab as before. God indeed so far regarded Ahab's humiliation, as to defer the judgment on his house. If one may so speak, the Lord caught at an opportunity to show Himself pitiful, even to such wretches as then reigned in Samaria, and to convince Israel that He was slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. But there is no light whatever around the fate of Ahab. At the instigation of false prophets, he went into battle with the king of Syria, and was mortally wounded. In the evening he died, and was taken to Samaria for burial. "One washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood." So ended the first part of the tragedy of the house of Omri.

Elijah suggests John the Baptist, who came indeed in the same "Spirit and power." The points of correspondence are briefly these—familiarity with the deserts and solitudes, austere manner and dress, strong reproof of prevailing evils, intrepid fidelity in calling all classes of men to repentance, exposure to the wrath of a wicked king, and a yet more wicked queen; continuance of their influence after death through disciples, and the result of their personal labours, that "many of the children of Israel did they turn to the Lord their God."

The Elijah ministry must come forth again, to confront sin in high places, and call kings and nations to repentance, lest the Lord smite the earth with a curse. Indeed, Elijah as well as Moses must come to every heart. Moses, the law, gives knowledge of sin; Elijah, the prophet, calls sin to mind, disturbs the conscience, abolishes the idols.

Elias, *i.e.*, John the Baptist, prepares the way of the Lord in the heart, as well as in the earth, calling to repentance. Then Christ comes, greater than he, baptizing with the Holy Ghost, speaking pardon, breathing peace.

## II. KINGS.

THE second book, or rather, second part of the one Book of Kings, traces the course of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah to their fall. It is not, however, by any means, a mere civil history, for it keeps always in view its position and purport as a part of Holy Scripture, and therefore dismisses with brevity long reigns, and important wars and conquests, in order to give prominence to the moral lessons and admonitions of the time, and to the religious characteristics and tendencies of kings, nobles, priests, and people.

### I. OF ISRAEL;—The Prophets, and the Kings.

#### 1. *The Prophets.*

Elijah was to the last a fiery spirit. In the beginning of the book we find him calling down fire from heaven, to consume the men who were sent to take him prisoner. The next thing we read is, that he himself went up as by fire into heaven. Having paid a last visit to the schools of the prophets, he crossed the Jordan with his faithful follower Elisha, and passed into his native Gilead. Then, as they talked, the whirlwind and fire, which had appalled Elijah as they passed by him at Horeb, came for him; and

he, without any sign of hesitation or fear, was carried up into heaven. Nothing of him fell to the earth but his mantle. Elisha caught it, and it was a sign that he received the double portion in Elijah's spirit, *i.e.*, he inherited the position of the first-born, and was now both entitled and qualified to take Elijah's place at the head of the schools of the prophets.

One cry, "My father!" and the young prophet turned to his duty—cleaving the river Jordan again, with Elijah's mantle, and an appeal to Elijah's God. Thus have many received a solemn call to duty, or an access of zeal and strength, from witnessing the departure of the great and good—catching the mantle at some death-bed, that was like a chariot of God.

The career of Elisha was long and illustrious. He was not a second and feebler Elijah, but another type of man—an equally original production of God, though cast in a milder mould, with more of mercy than of judgment. Elijah taught by his name that Jehovah was El or God, Elisha (God for salvation) taught by his name, that Jehovah, trusted in as God, would be for salvation to His people. Elijah was a man of mountains and deserts, and in his appearance showed the stern and startling character of his ministry. Elisha dwelt among men, and was in garb and appearance like any grave Israelite. His hair was trimmed, he carried a walking staff, and moved calmly to and fro, on the errands of a man of God.

Yet after his first deed of mercy, healing the bitter waters at Jericho, this prophet struck a blow of judgment. It was a strange work to him, but it was needful to assert his sacred authority at the outset. At Bethel, one of the seats of the calf-worship, wicked striplings called the prophet

"Bald-head," because of the contrast between his trimmed hair and the flowing locks of Elijah. Then they bade him "go up," in mocking allusion to his master's ascension. Elisha denounced them in the name of the Lord, and "there came forth two she-bears out of the wood and tare (not *killed*, but mangled) forty-two of them."

Then followed a most influential ministry. In the third chapter we have the prophet standing before kings. In the fourth, he multiplies the oil in a poor widow's house, and the bread among the sons of the prophets. Through his prayer of faith, a woman of position in Shunem, who had shown him hospitality, received her dead child raised to life again. The fifth chapter tells of Naaman, the Syrian general, cleansed from leprosy, by bathing in the river Jordan at Elisha's word. In such good works, and in constant testimony for God, passed the years of the son of Shaphat. Chariots and horses of fire were round about him for defence, as once was shown to his servant at Dothan. But he went not up in these, at the end of his course, as Elijah had done. He sickened and died, and was buried as other men. It was ominous for Israel, that no prophet caught Elisha's mantle, or continued his ministry. Gehazi, who ought to have been his successor, proved unworthy of the calling, for he "loved this present world;" and he who should have been a prophet, and might have healed lepers, became, through covetousness and deceit, himself a leper, white as snow.

There did, however, arise in Israel, during the period covered by this history, several faithful prophets, who, though they did not work wonders like Elijah and Elisha, spoke powerful reproofs of the prevailing immorality and

idolatry, and uttered piercing calls to repentance. We do not refer so much to Jonah, who is mentioned in chapter xiv., because the memorable part of his prophetic ministry was directed to the Gentiles. But Amos, the "herdsman" of Tekoa, lifted up a vehement testimony against the vices of the time, and, in the reign of the greatest of the northern kings, the second Jeroboam, foretold what was then most unlikely, the downfall of the kingdom, and the captivity of disobedient Israel. Hosea, too, about the same period, a prophet of great plaintiveness, a kind of northern Jeremiah, rebuked the corruption of life in Samaria, through drunkenness, licentiousness, and unruliness, and the corruption of worship by serving the molten calves, and by offending in Baal. The rejection of the word of the Lord, sent by these prophets, was the cause of Israel's ruin. Individuals, no doubt, obeyed the calls to repentance and were saved, but the court, the princes, and the people at large, would not hearken. The mighty works of Elijah and Elisha, and the piercing words of Amos and Hosea, were alike unheeded; so "the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants and prophets."

## 2. *The Kings.*

One son of Ahab reigned for two years. Another succeeded, and reigned for twelve years. He was so far an improvement on his father and brother, that he removed the image of Baal. This is that Jehoram or Joram who, with the kings of Judah and Edom, defeated Mesha, the king of the Moabites. Very curiously, after three thousand years, we have further information of king Mesha, from the famous Moabitish stone, the inscription on which de-

scribes the wars of Moab with Israel, and the reliance of Mesha, in his contest with the house of Omri, on the god Chemosh.

The reign of Joram was cut short by violence. It happened more than once in Israel, as it has occurred in other nations at times of weakness and distraction, that a bold and ambitious soldier, securing the support of the army, seized the throne. It was Jehu, anointed at Ramoth-Gilead by one of the sons of the prophets, who, with the ready adhesion of the officers of his army, marched rapidly on Jezreel, and surprised the king, who was ill from the wounds he had received in battle against the Syrians. As Joram turned to flee, Jehu pierced him with an arrow from his own bow, and seized on the palace, where he held a triumphal feast. On the same eventful day, the aged, yet not venerable, queen-mother, Jezebel, perished miserably, and was exposed to be the prey of the hungry dogs of the city. It was recognised as the fulfilment of Elijah's terrible words, that "in the portion of Jezreel, dogs should eat the flesh of Jezebel."

Jehu continued his way to Samaria, exterminated the race of Ahab, put to death many of the royal family of Judah, which was at this time on intimate terms with the reigning house in Israel, and completed his work by a relentless massacre of the worshippers of Baal. The image and temple of that heathen god were utterly defaced. "Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel." His worship may still have lingered in the land, but it was never publicly resumed, and the kingdom of Israel, from this time, returned to the worship which king Jeroboam established at first; the worship, nominally, of Jehovah, under



the form, and with the aid of, the golden calves of Dan and Bethel. Jehu reigned twenty-eight years in Samaria, a man of "might," but of a hard, stern character, an excellent hammer for breaking down, a remorseless minister of retribution, but not a producer or nourisher of that which is good.

Feeble rulers followed. Indeed there is only one great king in Israel after Jehu; it is Jeroboam the second, who reigned for forty-one years with extraordinary vigour. He took Damascus, and by force of arms, recovered the whole northern kingdom of Solomon. And yet his long reign is described in no more than seven verses. There was nothing to relate of moral or spiritual good. On the contrary, we gather from the prophets who lived under this king, that, under all his external prosperity, it was a time of abounding iniquity and gross depravity of life. Therefore the kingdom nodded to its fall.

Jeroboam's son and successor was slain by conspiracy, and so ended the dynasty of Jehu. There ensued a troubled period of about forty years under various kings, and then the catastrophe came. The old empire of Assyria rose at this time into overwhelming power, and extended its conquests over all the East. An Assyrian army appeared before Damascus, where an adventurer, named Rezin, had established himself as king of Syria. Damascus fell; and Hoshea, who proved to be the last king of Israel, terrified at the approach of the Assyrians, sought the help of the king of Egypt. It was too late. Hoshea was made prisoner, Samaria was taken, after a siege of three years, and the people of the land were carried away into captivity. The sensitiveness of the public mind, now-a-days,

to any violation of national feeling, the shock which it suffers at the forcible separation of a people from the country or government they prefer, was quite unknown in those stern days of old. As a matter of course and without hesitation, the main body of the inhabitants of Israel were transferred to remote provinces of the Assyrian empire. The Samaritans of the future were a people of mixed origin, partly Israelite, and partly Gentile. Their religion was also a thing of mixture and compromise. "They feared the Lord and served their own gods." We read no more good of the northern part of the Holy Land till we reach the days of Christ, who dwelt in Galilee, and, with purposes of love, passed once and again through Samaria.

## II. OF JUDAH.

The history of the southern kingdom is given with detail in 2 Chronicles, and needs not be very minutely related now. It endured no change of dynasty. All the kings were of the house of David, and the memory of his great name, of the covenant made with him, threw a sacred interest around even the most insignificant kings who ruled in Jerusalem. There was the throne of David, and there the temple of Solomon. There too the priesthood was continued, and not merely retained, but increased its influence. Yet this kingdom, too, fell before the heathen, and Judah went into captivity.

At the beginning of this book, we find the throne of David filled by Jehoshaphat, a vigorous ruler, and one of good intentions. But most unfortunately for his house, he allied himself with King Ahab, and his son and successor

married Athaliah, a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, also called "daughter, *i.e.* granddaughter of Omri." Like her mother, she was devoted to the worship of Baal and introduced it into Jerusalem. On the death of her husband, she, as queen-mother, wielded great influence over her son. He also died, and Athaliah's ambition aspired to the sole possession of the throne. Cruel and unscrupulous as her mother, she destroyed all the royal family, that she might obliterate the covenanted line of David, and heathenise Jerusalem. It was a dark hour for all who yet had faith in the covenant of God. The lamp ordained for David seemed to be put out, and the promise regarding his posterity appeared to fail. But not so! The wife of the high-priest, herself of royal extraction, rescued from the massacre a little boy, a babe in arms. He was hidden and brought up in the temple. Jehoiada, the high-priest, a man at once prudent and brave, waited till the boy, prince Joash, was seven years old; then brought him forth and proclaimed him king. He was received with joyful shouts, and the wicked Athaliah was ignominiously slain. The temple of Baal, which she had built, was overthrown by the people, and a time of religious reformation ensued. The young king, grateful for the protection he had received in the temple, made it his first care to repair the house of the Lord. For the greater part of his long reign he did well, but his latter years were unhappy, and he died by violence. His son, after a reign of twenty-five years, died by violence too. His grandson, called Azariah, but in Chronicles Uzziah, occupied the throne for the very long period of fifty-two years; but his later days were saddened by the taint of leprosy.

At this time, the solemn voices of prophets began to be heard in Judah. Amos and Hosea spoke of Jerusalem as well as Samaria. Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord, "in the year that King Uzziah died," and with the prophet Micah, continued to admonish and teach during the reigns of the three kings who followed, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

There is a striking alternation of good and evil in the rulers of this period. Jotham, though not a man of mark, feared the Lord and prospered. Ahaz had a very mania for introducing into Jerusalem the gods of the nations round about, "the abominations of the heathen." His infatuation brought the kingdom very low. Very unlike him was his son Hezekiah, perhaps the greatest and best of all the kings of Judah. Isaiah the prophet was his spiritual counsellor and friend. He had no great captains, but obtained by prayer what his sword could never have achieved, the destruction of the invading host from Assyria. We reserve a fuller notice of this devout prince till we reach the Second Book of Chronicles. His son and successor was of quite another spirit. Coming early to the royal dignity, Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years. By him paganism was restored in its worst forms, and the servants of God were cruelly persecuted. The history in Chronicles mentions an ultimate repentance of this wicked prince, but the book before us keeps silence. With terrible emphasis, however, it describes his evil career. "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord."\*

\* 2 Kings xxi. 16.

Pass over his like-minded son, and you come once more to a good king. It is Josiah, who reached the throne at the age of eight, and filled it for thirty-one years. Like the earlier boy-king, Joash, he had a zeal for the Temple, restored the service of Jehovah, and made a thorough havoc of the high places, images, altars, and groves of heathen worship, in Jerusalem and throughout all his realm. In his time, Zephaniah prophesied, and the important ministry of Jeremiah began. Alas! in the very prime of life, the King Josiah was slain in battle with the Egyptians. A gloom overspread the country which was long remembered, "the mourning of Hadad-Rimmon, in the valley of Megiddo, when the land mourned, every family apart." Well might they mourn! The last great King of Judah was dead, and the judgment, which many prophets had denounced, at last drew nigh.

The four kings that followed, and who closed the line, were weak and unfortunate. Hard pressed between the rival powers of Egypt and Babylon, they became feebler and feebler. At length the great Nebuchadnezzar added Judah to his other conquests, seized the capital, burnt down its holy places, and carried the king and the chief of the people captives to Babylon, leaving only "the poor of the land to be vine-dressers and husbandmen." By the rivers of Babylon the Jews sat down and wept, when they remembered Zion. They hung their harps on the willow trees, for they could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land.

Such is history, with long passages of apparent impunity for evil, but stern retributions at last. Individuals do not

meet in this life all the consequences of their actions, but either now or hereafter, they must reap what they have sown. The reaping time of nations is in this present world. By righteousness a people is exalted; by unrighteousness before God, opposition to His prophets, neglect of His word, corruption of morals among the rulers and the ruled, there must be incurred feebleness and ruin. Penalty may be inflicted instrumentally by a power which has great faults of its own, as Assyria and Babylon certainly had; but the judgment is none the less a Divine judgment, from which there is no possible escape or recovery without timely repentance. The cup of iniquity may be slowly filled; but if the course of self-will be persisted in, so soon as God sees the cup of iniquity to be full, He will wring out the wine of fierce wrath from a full cup on a guilty nation's head. "The dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring out, and drink them."

Yet God is good. We have destroyed ourselves, but in Him is our help. Let us, as a community, hear His voice, and, turning to Him, serve Him in our collective character, and honour Him in our public course of action. Let us, as individuals, repent of our waywardness, and give glory to the Lord our God. What have we to do any more with idols? Let us be as severe against them as Jehu or Josiah. Let us seek God's face as earnestly as Hezekiah did, then shall no Assyrian prevail against us, or daughter of Babylon lead us captive. Our safety and our happiness are bound up with fidelity to God and to Christ, and, in order to fidelity, we Gentiles must seek that blessing of a renewed heart which the Lord by Jeremiah promised in a

new covenant to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. "After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."\*

\* Jer. xxxi. 33, 34.



## I. CHRONICLES.

THE two Books of Chronicles, which originally formed one, stand last of all in the Hebrew Canon. They appear to be, in a great measure, compilations from official records kept in Jerusalem, and from historical or biographical works, by Nathan, Iddo the seer, and other writers. A holy man, moved by the Holy Ghost, gathered together important facts that might otherwise have passed into oblivion, and wrought them into a continuous narrative, so that nothing profitable should be lost. This holy man is supposed to have been Ezra, the scribe, and on good grounds, such as the similarity of style in the Chronicles to the acknowledged Book of Ezra, and the obvious connection between the conclusion of this history and the opening of that book. Even if Ezra were not the writer, it is certain that the Chronicles were completed at a period subsequent to the restoration of the Jews from captivity, for the genealogy of the house of David is brought down to a time long after the restoration,\* and in the end of the second book, we find mention of the decree of Cyrus for the return of the Jews to their land and the rebuilding of the Temple.

It is of importance thus to fix the date of the work, for

\* 1 Chron. iii. 16-24.

it casts much light on its scope and purport. At the restoration, difficulties arose about the genealogical succession to lands, and the re-organisation of Divine worship and service in the second Temple. To meet these difficulties were the Chronicles written, determining family descent, and fixing the Levitical genealogies and courses. Moreover, the leaders of the Jews, at the time, were most anxious to rekindle the spirit of patriotism, and to recall to the hearts of the people the faith of covenant promises. In this effort they were aided by the prophets of the period, Haggai and Zechariah; and to the same great object, the writer of the Chronicles brought a most valuable contribution. Taking no account of the extinct kingdom of Israel, he furnished a compendious history of the house and dynasty of David, and gave special prominence to the care for the Temple evinced by the great kings, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah, in order to stir up the people, who had returned from captivity, to build again the temple of the Lord.

As in the New Testament we have the advantage of reading the history of Jesus Christ in separate and independent gospels, so in the Old Testament we know David and his house all the better that we have two separate, if not entirely independent, records. Between the two, there are a few points of apparent discrepancy, the consideration of which belongs to detailed exposition, and not to a rapid survey like ours. Most of the points of difference, however, are due, as, in the case of the gospels, simply to the circumstance that each writer naturally dealt with the facts, or aspects of facts, that he knew best, or, without denying or depreciating others, used a just

liberty of selection in favour of those which accorded with the special aim and object of his narrative. Accordingly, many important matters related in the Books of Samuel and Kings, are omitted from the Chronicles, *e.g.*, the fall of David, the revolt of Absalom, the fall of Solomon, and the entire history of the separate kingdom of Israel, because these had no direct bearing on the object which the later writer kept in view. On the other hand, we have details in the later history, that are not found in the former. Let us notice some of these.

#### I. THE PEDIGREE OF DAVID, AND THE GENEALOGY OF THE TRIBES.

The former is traced in a condensed form from Adam, through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and this prominence is given to David to indicate his position in the covenant grace of God—the most significant person as regards the Gospel in all the Old Testament history, and the ancestor of Christ, whose pedigree also is traced by an Evangelist, through David and Abraham, to “Adam who was the son of God.”

The genealogical tables of the tribes may try our patience, but the Bible was not written for us only, and those tables were full of interest and practical use to the Jews of the restoration period, for whom they were provided. For us, too, they have an evidential value in favour of the authenticity of the sacred histories. No one writing annals from guess-work or vague tradition would venture to give such copious lists of names of men and places, and so many incidental allusions as we have in Genesis, in Numbers, and in Chronicles, for he would

supply against himself the greatest facilities for detecting untruth or unreality. The Bible historians write with the utmost frankness and simplicity, multiplying names and references without fear, because they know that their testimony is true.

The genealogy of Judah is enlivened by the episode of Jabez. If the names are as rows of hard stones that fatigue us when we walk on them, all the more precious this fragrant shrub, growing among them, and casting a sweet scent around. For some cause untold, a mother bare her son with unusual grief, and called him Jabez—Sorrowful; but it was God's good pleasure to turn this Benoni into a Benjamin, the Son of Sorrow into a Son of the Right Hand; and the sad-hearted mother's fear was not fulfilled, for Jabez proved "more honourable than his brethren." If we inquire the reason, it was because he prayed. Whatever gifts of wisdom, counsel, or courage he may have had among men, they are not put on record, but it is written that "he called on the God of Israel, saying, O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested."\* A true son of Israel, as a prince he had power with God and prevailed. He asked much, and obtained much. The Lord did great things for him, whereof, surely, Sorrowful was glad.

## II. THE HEROES OF DAVID.

The end of Saul is briefly told, and David's accession to

\* Chap. iv. 5-10

the throne immediately follows. The historian preserves the names of those who rallied to the son of Jesse, and proclaimed him king. Then we read much of his wars and conquests. It was a time favourable to the production and promotion of daring men, and David had the power of drawing these around him, and firing them with a strong enthusiasm.\*

Joab was "general of the king's army;" but the greater personal prowess is ascribed to three mighty men, Adino (Jashobeam), Eleazar, and Shammah, who did rare exploits against the Philistines. Abishai, Joab's brother, and Benaiah, captain of the king's body-guard, belonged to a second trio of mighty men. Thirty brave officers are also mentioned, among them Uriah the Hittite, whom the king cruelly wronged.

Notwithstanding his personal faults, David is constantly suggesting to us Christ. The great Son of David has always drawn good soldiers after Him, having power to develop their highest energies, and kindle in their breasts a sacred zeal. All David's men were not mighty, but such as were mighty in the land found their right arms all the stronger, and their courage all the loftier, that they were servants, and even comrades, of the hero-king. So all the followers of Christ have not been "mighties," but brave hearts and

\* The warriors who surrounded David make one think of the Knights of the Round Table in King Arthur's Court.

"And Arthur and his knighthood for a space  
Were all one will, and through that strength the king  
Drew in the petty pryncedoms under him ;  
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame  
The heathen hordes, and made a realm, and reign'd.

TENNYSON. *The Coming of Arthur.*

fervent spirits have found ample scope and holy incentive in the service and companionship of the King of Saints. The "mighties" whom He drew around Him while He was on earth were the apostles, the officers of His band whom He armed with weapons, "not carnal," but "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." What have we in the Acts of the Apostles but the exploits of mighty men, who fought not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places? The Eleazars, and Benaiahs, and Abishais of the New Testament are such Christian leaders as Peter and John, and Paul.

### III. THE ORDERING OF THE LEVITES AND SINGERS.

King David arranged the Levites in courses for Divine service. They were no more required to carry the pieces of the tabernacle hither and thither, for "the Lord God of Israel had given rest unto His people;" but in the temple about to be built by Solomon, the Levites were to attend, as assistants to the priests, the lineal descendants of Aaron. At the return from captivity, the Levitical courses were resumed, and they appear to have been maintained down to the Christian era, for it is mentioned that Zacharias, who served in the Temple, was "of the course of Abia."

A large number of the Levites took part in the musical service instituted by David. "Four thousand praised the Lord with the instruments." There was a more skilled company of musicians and singers, two hundred and eighty-eight in number,—the four thousand, probably, serving as grand chorus on occasions. All these were organized and led by three great masters, Asaph, Heman, and



Jeduthun. It was the happiness of David, not only as a warrior, to draw warriors round him, and as an able ruler, to attract statesmen, but also, as a born musician and poet, to surround himself with musicians and poets, who assisted in the production of the psalter, and composed suitable melodies for the lyrics in which the king delighted. Suddenly there came upon Jerusalem the golden age of Hebrew music and song. The songs are, happily, preserved for the admiration and use of the Christian Church. The music was a recitative or solemn chant, sung in unison, the theory of harmony being unknown to the nations of antiquity. To our ears, long chants sung in unison are monotonous, but David and his musicians knew how to obtain variety by the alternation of voices in the chorus, and by the use of instruments, harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets. There was no direction of God to authorise these instruments, nor does it appear that any question or difficulty on that score was ever raised. The truth is, that their use was reckoned as a matter of course, for the Orientals were not wont to sing without an instrumental accompaniment, however primitive.\* If our custom is different, we have just the same right to dispense with instruments as others have to use them, for God has never enjoined them any more than He has forbidden or condemned them. It is wise, in the interest of the simplicity of worship, to dispense as far as possible with costly mechanical appliances and aids; but we cannot admit the existence of any stronger argument against the use of instruments in the service of praise. To our minds nothing can be more unreasonable, than the position of those who assume

\* Gen. xxxi. 27 ; Exod. xv. 20, 21, &c.



and allege that they are the champions of good old customs, when they sing David's Psalms in metres David never heard of, and in four-parts harmony, which David never knew, but without musical instruments, which David invariably employed.

It is of great importance, to note well the period at which sacred song established its place in Divine worship. By the law, came neither psalm nor sacred music. A trumpet from the top of Mount Sinai, not in human hands, announced the Lawgiver's descent, but the people could not sing under the holy commandments. Trumpets were blown by the priests at new-moon, but there was no provision for any song of priests or people in all the worship prescribed in the wilderness. Praise is united, not with law, but with the spirit of prophecy. Moses sang, as a prophet, over the redemption and exodus from Egypt, and sang again before his death, or better exodus to rest with God. Deborah, the prophetess, sang of victory. A company of prophets, in the days of Samuel, prophesied, as the Spirit of God moved them, "with a psaltery, a tabret, a pipe, and a harp." So David prophesied, and Asaph and Heman "prophesied and sang." It was a time of the operation of the Spirit of God, in which sweet song obtained a leading place in the religious service. The Law required the calves of the stall, but prophecy presented to Jehovah the calves of the lips. It was the time of the kingdom, too, a decided advance on that of Moses and the Law. The throne of David was established in grace, and secured by a covenant of promise. Then, and not till then, was heard the voice of praise in the courts of the house of the Lord. Why is it that the Christian

Church has had, from the beginning, impulse and capacity for sacred song? It is because the Spirit of God has been poured out, and because Christ reigns in grace, and "sings praise in the midst of the Church." It is meet, that there should be a continual offering of the sacrifice of praise from every Christian assembly. And there are better days to come. When our Lord, according to the promise, shall sit on the throne of His father David, the golden age of Christian song and music will arrive, and all the earth shall make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

#### IV. THE PREPARATION MADE BY DAVID FOR THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

We have already explained that this history was written, in the first instance, for the Jews who were called on to rebuild the ruined Temple at Jerusalem. Care is therefore taken, to show them how dear Temple-building was to the heart of the great king David. He was not, indeed, permitted to carry out his desire, for there was always a coming-short in the greatest men before Christ. Abraham died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off. Moses died, not having entered the land, but having seen it afar off. And David died, not having built the Temple, but having seen its pattern in the Spirit, and having provided, for its erection, great store of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, marble, and onyx stones. All this he made over to Solomon, and charged him "to be strong and do it;" then blessed the congregation of Israel, and died "in a good old age."

Moses lived on in Joshua, David in Solomon. The two leaders, together, typify Christ as Leader and Commander

of His people. The two kings, together, typify Christ as the King on the hill of God's holiness, God's power for energetic subdual of enemies, and God's wisdom for judgment of the people and for the erection of His sacred Temple. The preparation, the construction, and the consecration of the Christian Temple, are all of Christ. He gathers the lively stones, and by the Spirit, builds up His Church as a habitation of God through the Spirit, a sublime Temple, against which no inroad of enemies, or gates of Hades, shall prevail.

The Temple in Jerusalem was to perish, yet the treasures devoted to it were well spent. Our edifices for Divine worship are to perish, but we must not on that account construct them meanly, or deal with them in a penurious spirit. If we do, David and his people will rise up in judgment against us. "Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord, and David, the king, also rejoiced with great joy." The king said to the God of Israel, "Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thy holy name, cometh of thine hand, and is all Thine Own."\*

Let us, however, clearly keep in view, that all the houses made with hands have to crumble into dust, or be burned with fire. It is the living Temple of God, the Church of Christ alone, which is impregnable and imperishable. They are in the Church who cleave to Christ

\* 1 Chron. xxix. 9, 14, and 16.

and confess Him as the Son of the Living God. They are in that Church, in whom dwells the Spirit of Christ and of God. They who are at heart estranged from Christ, or have not His Spirit, are "none of His," and they that are not His, are not in the Church, no matter though all the Ecclesiastics in Christendom had received them, and poured streams of holy water and rivers of consecrating oil upon their heads.

The roll of names, the list of heroes, the ordinance of Song, the preparation for the Temple; these are what we have found peculiar to First Chronicles. Would you belong to Christ the Son of David; your name will be written in Heaven, within the Lamb's Book of Life; your calling will be that of a man of war, fighting the good fight of faith; your lips will be opened that your mouth may show forth God's praise; and you shall lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord within His holy Temple.

## II. CHRONICLES.

For reasons already given, this history confines itself to the reigning House of David in Jerusalem, and describes the kingdom of Judah, rather in its ecclesiastical, than in its political aspects and relations. The chief matters it contains may be arranged under three heads.

I. *The love to the Temple and worship of Jehovah, evinced by the best kings of the House of David.*

Solomon's wisdom and splendour are mentioned, but the greater prominence is given to his care in building, and devoutness in dedicating, the "House of the Lord." In his time, the old Tabernacle was transfigured into a holy and beautiful Temple, overlaid with pure gold and garnished with precious stones. When the venerable Ark was set in its place within this Temple, and the voice of praise was lifted up with trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments of music, "saying, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever," the House was filled with a cloud, "for the glory of Jehovah had filled the House of God." So, in all times and places, praise has the most efficacy to obtain the glorious presence or Shechinah of God. Then followed prayer and sacrifice; and God answered by fire,

consuming the offerings, and again filling the House with His glory. The dedication of that temple was the grandest passage in King Solomon's life; and the prayer which he offered, as he stood with outstretched hands before the altar, is one of the very noblest and most comprehensive effusions of Hebrew piety. At the close of the feast, he dismissed the people, "glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the Lord had showed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel, His people."

King Asa, the great grandson of Solomon, was the next of the kings who showed special regard for the temple and its services. He deposed his own mother from her state as Queen Dowager, "because she had made an idol in a grove." The idol he destroyed with all others that he found in Judah and Benjamin; then renewed the altar of the Lord, and brought into His House, as dedicated things, "silver, gold, and vessels." To him rallied many devout persons from the northern kingdom of Israel. "They fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him."

The next king who evinced a zeal for the Temple was Joash. Grateful for the shelter he enjoyed there in his infancy, he "was minded to repair the House of the Lord." After his time, though Judah and Jerusalem were tainted with heathen superstitions, the great Temple was, on the whole, treated with respect, till the days of the infatuated idolater, Ahaz, who "cut in pieces the vessels of the House of God, and shut up the doors of the House." The whole of the beautiful interior was left to neglect and decay.

Happily, the successor of Ahaz was a prince of a quite different spirit. The very first use Hezekiah made of his

kingly power was to re-open, cleanse, and repair the Temple. He began this good work "in the first year of his reign, in the first month." There ensued a great religious reformation. The House of the Lord being purified, and the ministry of priests and Levites re-organised, the public service was resumed, the sin-offering was slain, the burnt-offering smoked upon the altar, and the song of the Lord went up again with cymbals, harps, and sound of trumpets. This done, and well done, the king took counsel with his princes and all the congregation in Jerusalem regarding the long-neglected celebration of the Passover; and the great feast was successfully restored.

In the conduct of Hezekiah, as the reviver of the Passover, are two things well worthy of our notice:—

1. He showed a large mind in subordinating the letter of the law to its spirit. The first month, the proper time for the Passover, was past. It was consumed in cleansing the temple. Then the king did not postpone the feast for a year, in bondage to the mere form and letter of the institution. He felt that too much precious time had already been lost, so he appointed a special Passover in the second month.

If a Jew could thus judge, the lesson should be easy for us. It is wrong to depart without cause from the letter of Christ's ordinances; but we ought to think far more of their spirit, and be glad that, in our dispensation, the letter is reduced to a minimum, just to give the spirit ampler scope.

2. He showed a large heart, in sending out invitations to the Passover, through all the land. The king would gather together, not Judah only, but the dispersed of



Israel. When he caused burnt-offerings and sin-offerings to be sacrificed, it was "for all Israel." He loved, as every man taught of God must love, the unity of the redeemed, and yearned, as every such man yearns, for the manifestation and enjoyment of that unity. So, when he would keep the Passover, the memorial of the redemption, not of one or two, but of twelve tribes, out of the House of Bondage, the king sent his proclamation, in grave and touching words, from Dan even to Beersheba. The invitation obtained a various reception. Those who belonged to the powerful tribe of Ephraim, accustomed to vex Judah, treated it with scorn. But divers of the less influential tribes "humbled themselves and came." Nay, in the end, a good many came from Ephraim too, and all that came were filled with blessing. Such was the enjoyment of that Passover, that, by universal consent, it was kept for two weeks instead of one. "So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem."\* Why, not since the days of Solomon? Surely, because immediately after his reign, the unity of the ancient household of faith was broken, and new centres of worship were made at Bethel and Dan, to the ruin of true religion. Now, in regard to the disruption of the chosen nation, as in regard to dissensions and disruptions of Churches, there was "much to be said on both sides;" but Hezekiah did not enter into any of the old disputes, or insist on having an historical controversy settled on a ground of argument. With a wise simplicity, he went back three hundred years, to the good old way of David

and Solomon, assured that the reunion of His people round the symbols or memorials of their redemption, must be according to the mind of God.

Let us, in the same spirit, favour the enlargement of Church fellowship, and take to Hezekiah's healing, restoring, comprehending policy—the only way to drive out the miserable denominationalism and separatism that distract and enfeeble the Protestant Christendom. Let us not revert to all the old disputes, or endeavour to fix on one another the guilt of schism, but, without upbraiding, rally as brethren around the old centre of Christian unity—"Christ our Passover." Why not go back, as respects communion to the good old way of the Primitive Church, when the formation of separate sects was reprobated as a work of the flesh,\* and let the circumcised in heart break bread and drink wine together, without hindrance, before the Lord, and in remembrance of Him? No doubt, there must be a centre of unity to which the redeemed come together, and around which they are grouped: but this is not a city or a holy see; not Rome, nor Geneva, nor Constantinople, nor Canterbury, nor Edinburgh—no, nor any separatist meeting of purists, who think themselves "the faithful few;" but the name of Jesus only, and the redemption in His blood. Many will call this visionary, just as many derided the large proposals of Hezekiah; but all who humble themselves to fall in with the plan of healing breaches, and binding in one communion the scattered people of God, will get such increase of grace, and comfort in Christ, and joy in the Holy Ghost, as, in narrow lines of separation, they could never reach.

\* Gal. v. 20.

Hezekiah could not consider the reformation complete, so long as heathen images and altars stood in the groves. The zeal to make an end of these was now well kindled. The young king did wisely, first to gather his people round the true altar, and give them to taste the sweetness of uniting in the worship of God, and in the feast of redemption, and then when their enthusiasm was warm, to lead them to the destruction of idols and their shrines. "Now, when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all." \*

So is it always. The strength to turn from idols, and the holy zeal to make an end of the evils which corrupt and divide the Church, must be got at the altar of God. We do not first complete our reformation, and then come to the blood of sprinkling and the feast of redeeming love; but to these we come first, and then go forth to abolish idols, and to testify against those evils which have found room in the highways and high places of the Church, as in the streets and groves of Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh.

Alas! the son of Hezekiah resembled not his father, but his grandfather; and though he did not, like him, shut up the doors of the temple, he did worse, for he erected "altars for the host of heaven" in the courts of the house, and actually "set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God." Before his death, Manasseh,

\* 2 Chron. xxxi. 1.

being penitent, removed these accursed things, and repaired the Lord's altar. But the wrong that he had done to the true religion in his long reign was not to be easily undone and his son and successor reversed this later policy, and took the side of heathenism.

It required the vigour of Josiah, the last of the good kings, to bring about another, though, as it unfortunately proved, a transient reformation. While the temple was under repair by his command, the High Priest found a book there, and gave it to Shaphan the scribe, who read it to the king. It was a Book of the Law of Moses, probably the ancient roll of Deuteronomy, lost and forgotten during troublous times. Josiah was deeply moved as he listened to it, and, taking the book into his own hand, he read it aloud to the priests, Levites, elders, and people, great and small. By the law came to them a knowledge of sin, and after the reading, a solemn covenant of obedience was publicly made.

In the reign of this king, the heathen worship was thoroughly uprooted, or rather, mowed down, for the roots remained in the national mind, as soon appeared to their shame. Josiah was certainly a great Iconoclast, even in the twentieth year of his age, or twelfth of his reign. And the reformation from heathenism was rather forced by the monarch's will, than effected by the spontaneous action of a people whose hearts had turned to Jehovah, as it was in the days of Hezekiah. Josiah's passover, however, is enthusiastically described as surpassing, not only that of Hezekiah, but also those of the times of David and Solomon. "There was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet."

The early death of Josiah was the knell of Jerusalem. The kingdom staggered and fell, and the temple fell with it. First, the house of the Lord was robbed of its goodly vessels, which were carried as trophies to Babylon, and at last it was burned with fire. The Chronicles, however, do not end with this catastrophe. True to their main purpose of stirring up a zeal for temple restoration, they stretch across the seventy years of the captivity, and relate that "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up."

II. *Deliverances wrought for the House of David, because God had a favour unto them.*—We mention four of them, and mark in them a kind of progress.

1. Abijah (or Abijam), the son of Rehoboam, is little accounted of in the Book of Kings, but is celebrated in the Chronicles as having gained a signal victory over Jeroboam. The armies were already engaged, and the tide of battle had turned against the forces of Abijah, when Judah cried to the Lord, and the priests sounded with the trumpets. Then the tide of battle turned again, and God smote Jeroboam, and delivered the men of Israel into the power of the army of Judah. It was taken as a mark of Divine favour, a sign that the kingdom of Jehovah was "in the hands of the sons of David."

2. Asa, the son of Abijah, and a better man than he, found himself and his army confronted by a prodigious host of Ethiopians. He had not joined battle, but had set his men in array. Then he made appeal to Jehovah his God in these noble words:—"Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Jehovah, thou art our God: let not man prevail against Thee!" Then the battle was joined, and the Lord, in answer to King Asa's appeal, gave him at once the mastery over the Ethiopian host.

3. Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, had a still more wonderful deliverance. He was threatened by a formidable combination of Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites, and went out with an army against them, but did not even set his men in battle array as his father had done, far less, give way in the midst of a combat, like his grandfather. Before he left Jerusalem, he made his appeal to God in the temple, and when he marched forth with his army, it was with the voice of singers going before, and saying, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever." The soldiers of Judah drew no sword, and shot no arrow from the bow, for, ere they reached the camping ground of their enemies, fierce dissension had broken out, and the allies fell on one another with great slaughter. Jehoshaphat and his men had nothing to do but carry away the spoil.

4. Hezekiah had a deliverance which marked even yet more impressively the hand of God. In the first case, battle was joined, and when it went against Judah, the Lord turned the tide in their favour. In the second, before a



blow was struck, the Lord heard prayer, and gave the victory from the very beginning of the battle, to the army of a son of David. In the third, there was no battle, but the army returned to Jerusalem laden with spoil. Now, in the fourth, no army went out of Jerusalem's gate, and yet a great deliverance was wrought.

When the Assyrians approached his capital, King Hezekiah took certain military precautions,—diverted the water-courses, so as to secure the supply of the city during a siege, and repaired the walls and forts. Then he addressed his "captains of war" in these admirable words of faith—"Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there be more with us than with him: with him is an army of flesh, but with us is Jehovah our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah." The Assyrian host drew nearer, and surged in waves of defiance round Jerusalem. Mocking words were spoken, and railing letters sent in to crush the spirit of the Jews. Hezekiah met the crisis as a man who believed in his God. The enemy trusted in "chariots and horses," but he remembered the name of Jehovah. The Assyrians buckled on their armour, but the king of Judah rent his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the House of the Lord. Sennacherib would have laughed him to scorn, and thought him to be in an agony of fear, if he had seen the pious king on his knees before an invisible God. But the Assyrian had better have trembled and fled. Hezekiah was there in his fort of strength. Confessedly helpless in his own resources, he spread out



before the mighty God the insulting letter he had received : and that man of faith on his knees, having access to God touching a matter that concerned God's glory, was stronger far than Sennacherib in all his warlike pomp. So, without any arm of flesh, or "shouting of the captains," Jerusalem was delivered. "Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amos, prayed and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the King of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land."

III. *The unworthiness of the house of David, proving that the Lord favoured them, not for their merits, but for His own name's sake, and His servant David's sake.*

Some of the kings were simply wicked, as Rehoboam, Jehoram, Ahaz, and Amon. Others were weak as well as worthless, as the last three before the captivity.

One who was evil exceedingly turned to God. It was Manasseh. In affliction and captivity,\* he repented of his

\* "The monuments at Babylon distinctly mention 'Manasseh, king of Judah,' among the tributaries of Esarhaddon ; and though no direct confirmation has as yet been found of the captivity and restoration of the Jewish monarch, yet the narrative contains an incidental allusion which is in very remarkable harmony with the native records. One is greatly surprised at first hearing that the generals of an *Assyrian* king, on capturing a rebel, carried him to *Babylon* instead of Nineveh ; one is almost inclined to suspect a mistake. 'What has a king of Assyria to do with Babylon?' one naturally asks. The reply is, that Esarhaddon, and *he only of all the Assyrian kings*, actually was king of Babylon—that he built a palace, and occasionally held his court there—and that consequently a captive was as likely to be brought to him at that city as at the metropolis of Assyria proper. Had the narrative fallen under the reign of any other Assyrian monarch, this explanation could not have been given, and the difficulty would have been considerable. Occurring when it does, it furnishes no

career of wickedness and cruelty, and when restored to his throne, bore himself as a servant of God. The record of this in the Chronicles is very brief—just enough to show how the divine grace could abound to a most flagitious sinner, but encouraging no one to presume on a late repentance. In “the Books of the Seers,” now lost, the matter was recorded at length. The prayer of the penitent king is alluded to as written among “the sayings of the Seers,” possibly the same as that Greek “prayer of Manasses” which precedes the Book of Maccabees in the ordinary collection of the Apocrypha.

Others who began well on David’s throne made a sorry end. Joash, after all his early love for the temple, hearkened to the princes who were more prone to heathenism than the people, and “served groves and idols.” Nay, he rejected the admonition of the son and successor of his old friend and preserver, the high priest Jehoiada; and the faithful witness Zechariah was “stoned with stones, at the commandment of the king, in the court of the House of the Lord.” The end of Joash was very unhappy. He suffered much from complicated disease; he was assassinated; and his body, though buried in the city of David, was not laid in the sepulchres of the kings.

His son, Amaziah, had a similar history. He began well, but in course of years fell into idolatry, weakened his kingdom, and died by the hands of conspirators. The next of the royal line, Uzziah, also disappoints us. He

difficulty at all, but is one of those small points of incidental agreement which are more satisfactory to a candid mind than even a very large amount of harmony in the main narrative.”—*Rawlinson’s Bampton Lectures*. Lect. VI., pp. 114, 115.; 2d Ed.

began well, and prospered; "but when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." He usurped the priest's office, and presumed to burn incense at the altar in the Holy Place. There fell on him, as a mark of Divine displeasure, the plague of leprosy. "And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house."

Even the best of the kings came short. Hezekiah, who bore himself so well in time of trouble, failed and erred in prosperity. After the withdrawal of the great Sennacherib, complimentary embassies came to the king of Judah. Among them was one from Babylon—ominous name!—by which the heart of Hezekiah was elated.\* The king of Assyria had threatened him, and he prayed. The king of terrors (as death is often called) threatened him too, and he prayed.† These did him no harm, but good. But, when the king of Babylon sent to him letters and a present, Hezekiah was thrown off his guard, and prayed not. The letters from Babylon he neglected to spread before the Lord, but, flattered by such attention, he showed the ambassadors "the house of his precious things." "There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion,

\* "The fact of the embassy, which seems improbable, if we only know the general condition of Babylon at the period to have been one of subjection to Assyria, becomes highly probable, when we learn—both from Berosus and the monuments—that there was a fierce and bitter hostility between Merodach-Baladan and the Assyrian monarchs, from whose oppressive yoke he more than once freed his country. The ostensible motive of the embassy—to inquire about an astronomical marvel (the going back of the shadow on the dial, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31)—is also highly probable in the case of a country where astronomy held so high a rank, where the temples were observatories, and the religion was to a great extent astral."—*Rawlinson's Bampton Lectures*. Lect. IV., p. 119.; 2d Ed.

† 2 Chron. xxxii. 24; Isa. xxxviii.

that Hezekiah showed them not." From that day, the greed of Babylon was not satisfied till it took and plundered Jerusalem. Thus did a godly man err, when "God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." A grave warning it is to us, that the smile of the world may do us more harm than its frown; and that a spirit which has been braced by difficulty, and invigorated through danger, is likely enough after all to be enfeebled by ease and beguiled by flattery.

The writer of the "Pilgrim's Progress," with his unfailing spiritual tact, lets Christian and Hopeful proceed far on their heavenward way, and then shows how, with all their experience, they became entangled in the net of the Flatterer. Unable to escape, they lay bewailing themselves, till a Shining One came to them with a whip of small cord in his hand. He rent the net, and led the pilgrims back into the good way. "He asked, moreover, if the Shepherds did not bid them beware of the Flatterer? They answered, Yes: but we did not imagine, said they, that this fine-spoken man had been he." Then the Shining One chastised them, saying, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chastise; be zealous, therefore, and repent." So they thanked Him, and went softly on their way. Lay the story to heart, all ye that bend your steps towards the Celestial City. Somewhere on the way you will be flattered to your hurt; and if you take pleasure from the Flatterer, you shall have to take a whipping from your loving Saviour.

The entire history contained in this book is full of admonition for individuals, for the Church, and for the

nations. The catastrophe at the close may well cause great searchings of heart. Sin ruined all—the house of David—the temple of Solomon—the city of so many grand and holy memories. There is no heart, no house, no kingdom, no Church, that sin will not undermine and destroy. In the end of the book, God seems to weep over Jerusalem, but He would not force upon it His worship or His law. He spoke to the kings and the people by His prophets. If they would not hearken, nothing could prevent their destruction. In a later age, the Son of God wept over Jerusalem, because its children would not be gathered to Him. The “City of Solemnities” would ruin itself again. The same love of God yearns still over cities, countries, Churches, families, and individual men, women, and children. We beseech you all to gather with the happy brood under His wings, and learn the things that belong to your peace, lest they be hid from your eyes.

## EZRA.

EZRA is supposed to have written this book, and to have edited and revised the Old Testament Canon of Scripture. He was a priest, lineally descended from Aaron—a great student of the Holy Writings, “a ready scribe in the law of Moses.” We infer that he was a man of note among the captives in Babylon, from his having attracted the favour and confidence of the king of Persia, who “granted him all his request.”

This history resembles the Chronicles in style, in its preservation of genealogical tables, and in the prominence it gives to the succession of the priests, the order and courses of the Levites, and the appointments for Divine service. It tells us of the rebuilding of the temple, and the restoration of public worship in Jerusalem. The Gentiles still retained power over Judah and Jerusalem: they retain it to this day. But the Son of David was to be manifested in the city where David had reigned—the Lord was to come to His temple; and, in order to His manifestation and coming, it was needful that some at least of the Jews should be led back from captivity, and planted in Palestine with the polity and worship of their fathers. In the fulness of time Jesus Christ came, and was declared



to be the Son of David; but the Jews rejected Him, and would have no king but Cæsar. So He took not at that time the throne of His father David, which the Lord God assigned to Him at His nativity. He went to a far country, even a heavenly,—and the temple fell,—the Jews were scattered again from their land, and so continue, having no king but Cæsar. The Son of David, however, will come a second time, and receive the kingdom. Then shall be the great restoration of Israel; and the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of Jesus.

The Book of Ezra covers a period of about eighty years. In the events related to the end of the sixth chapter, the writer took no part. They were before his time, or occurred in his childhood. Twenty years passed during these transactions. A space of about sixty years intervenes between the sixth chapter and the seventh. Then Ezra personally appears; and the events described in the latter part of the book, in which he bore the prominent part, occurred in course of a few months. No signs or wonders are recorded. The miraculous element, so abundant in some of the books through which we have passed, is entirely wanting here: and the history takes a subdued tone, in harmony with the feebleness and depression of the period.

I. OF THE PART PLAYED IN THIS HISTORY BY GENTILE KINGS.—Four are mentioned—Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes; and, in accordance with the purpose of Holy Writ, these mighty monarchs are alluded to, not at all in their relation to their subjects at large, or the general history of the world, but simply and solely as they affected



the career of Israel, and of revealed religion in its Old Testament form.

*Cyrus* (*Koresh*) means in Persian the sun, thus corresponding with the Egyptian title Phrah or Pharaoh. The Prince who bore that name, both in sacred and profane history, is one of the chief heroes of antiquity, and is known to our schoolboys from the romantic pages of Xenophon. It was he who, at the head of the Medo-Persian army, took Babylon by the stratagem of diverting the course of the river, and marching along its dry bed into the heart of the city. A Median Prince, Darius, then ruled over Babylonia for two years. At his death, Cyrus assumed the government of the whole empire, and was supreme throughout Western Asia. The prophet Daniel enjoyed his confidence as he had that of Darius : \* and we can imagine the venerable man showing to the king the roll of the prophet Isaiah, in which the name of Cyrus was written, and his capture of Babylon and restoration of the Jews were clearly predicted two hundred years before—"Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him," &c.† Whether Cyrus was informed of and influenced by this prophecy or not, it is certain that, as a Persian and a Monotheist, he must have been favourably disposed towards the Jews, in contrast with the idolaters of Babylon. And, in the first year of his reign—*i.e.*, his reign over Babylonia—he put an end to the forced exile of the Jewish people, conceding to them by decree full liberty to return to their own land, and build the house of Jehovah their God in Jerusalem.

\* See Daniel vi. 28.

† Isaiah xlv. 1-13.

Much difference of opinion has existed on the identification of the other kings named in this book with those mentioned in profane history as the Persian Emperors. Darius, we have no doubt, is the Darius Hystaspes, a most able and vigorous ruler, of whom we have a long account in Herodotus. His successor, Xerxes, an ostentatious and luxurious prince, is most probably the Ahasuerus of Scripture; and the Artaxerxes mentioned in the 7th chapter of this book, and in that of Nehemiah, is the Artaxerxes Longimanus of the Greek historians.\* These were among the most arbitrary sovereigns the world ever saw, yet were they, in all that related to the Jews, the unconscious instruments of a far higher Power—the Will of God, which works through all history, and, by the march of armies, the revolutions of empires, and the decrees of princes, as well as through the gentler forces of civilisation and peace, carries out benign purposes, and fulfils the roll of prophecy.

## II. OF THE JEWS WHO RETURNED TO JERUSALEM, AND THEIR LEADERS.

1. The first expedition returned under the decree of Cyrus. It numbered in all about 50,000 souls. At their head were Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The former, called by the Persians "Sheshbazzar, the Prince of Judah," was the representative of the House of David, and as such entitled to the first position. Into his care Cyrus delivered the golden and silver vessels of the Temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away to Babylon. The latter of these eminent men was High Priest, and is prominent in the

\* On the Persian kings named by Ezra, see Bleek's *Introd. to the Old Testament*, English edition, vol. i., pp. 419-422.

visions of the Prophet Zechariah.\* The two worthies, representing civil and sacred authority, proceeded in entire harmony to lay the foundations of a second temple in Jerusalem, to set the priests and Levites in their order for service, to erect an altar for burnt-offerings, and to recall the song of the good days of old—"For He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever." It was a time of great emotion, loud weeping, and louder joy. As it is graphically told—"Many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off."†

The Samaritans and other colonists, or settlers, of heathen and semi-heathen origin, made advances to the Jews, and proffered their co-operation. It was refused by Zerubbabel and his associates, because they were resolved to keep the work in the hands of Jews of pure extraction. Indeed the whole tone of the histories after the captivity (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) is intensely anti-heathen and exclusive. The result was that the Samaritans resented this treatment, and hindered the Jews—even writing an accusation of disloyalty against them to the Persian king, and obtaining a decree to stop the works at Jerusalem.

A long delay ensued; but the Jews, being stirred up by the appeals of Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets of the

\* Zech. iii.

Ezra iii. 12, 13.

time, resumed the building of the temple. In vindication of their liberty to do so, they appealed to the original decree of Cyrus. Search being made for it, the document was found among the archives in a palace in Media; and King Darius confirmed it in most vigorous terms, requiring that every facility should be given to the governor and elders of the Jews. Accordingly, the work was prosecuted with zeal, and the temple was completed in about twenty years after Zerubbabel laid its foundation. The word of the Lord by Zechariah was fulfilled—"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it."\* The feast of dedication was kept with every sign of joy; for, though it was a "day of small things" compared with the dedication of the first temple, it was a day to be much remembered, when the Lord turned again the captivity of His people, restored their religious privileges and consolations, and did great things for them in the sight of the heathen, whereof they were glad.

The period of the captivity had been just seventy years, as Jeremiah foretold. If we count from Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion and carrying away of captives, to the decree of Cyrus, and the return of the first expedition under Zerubbabel, we compute seventy years. Or, if we reckon from the later date of the destruction of the first temple to the later date of the dedication of the second, we also find seventy years. The appointed space of time having elapsed, God

Brought them back,  
Remembering mercy, and his covenant sworn  
To David, establish'd as the days of heaven.

\* Zech. iv. 9.

2. It was about sixty years "after these things"\* that the second expedition left Babylon. Darius continued to reign for thirty-one years. Then Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was king for twenty-one years; so that the whole Book of Esther falls chronologically within the gap between the 6th and 7th chapters of the history before us. Artaxerxes succeeded Xerxes; and in the seventh year of his reign, with his cordial approval, Ezra in person led a second company of Jews to Jerusalem. They were not nearly so many as returned with Zerubbabel, for by this time the Jews had made themselves at home in various provinces of the empire; they had prospered greatly under Esther and Mordecai, in the latter years of Xerxes, and were not very eager to exchange their rich settlements among the heathen for the poor prospect of re-colonising Judea. But Ezra gathered together "chief men of Israel," with a good many priests and Levites, and received from the king a valuable offering of gold and silver vessels for the new temple at Jerusalem.

With simplicity, one may almost say with *naïveté*, the good scribe tells us that he was ashamed to ask a guard of soldiers from the king, because he had spoken to Artaxerxes of the protection of the Almighty God. Rather than weaken the force of his testimony, or give opportunity for a heathen taunt in reply, he held his peace, and took the risk of a journey unarmed through many foes. Or rather, he cast his anxiety on Jehovah, proclaiming for his companions a fast before they set out. "So we fasted and besought our God for this, and He was entreated of us." The journey of about 700 miles was then safely accom-

\* Ezra vii. 1.

plished ; and Ezra, on arriving at Jerusalem, at once began his work of reforming abuses, and insisting on the separation of Israel to God.

About thirteen years after this time, there went up a third expedition under Nehemiah—but it is not mentioned in this book, which indeed is of a fragmentary character, and ends abruptly. We know, however, that Ezra still lived in Jerusalem during the government of Nehemiah, and heartily co-operated with him in his reforming labours. Indeed, the Joshua and Zerubbabel of the beginning of the restoration period, may be said to reappear in Ezra and Nehemiah, the Scribe and the Tirshatha, the ecclesiastical and civil leaders of Judah and Jerusalem.

### III. OF THE RELIGIOUS BEARINGS OF THIS HISTORY.

The captivity effectually cured the Jews of their hankering after strange gods. They returned to their land with an abhorrence of idol worship, and resumed their place as witnesses to the supremacy and sole deity of Jehovah. To this day, they have never forgotten the lesson, and, into whatever earthliness and blindness of heart they have fallen, they have never relapsed into any such heathenism as that of Ahaz and Manasseh before the captivity.

They were, however, at first in some danger of doing so. When Ezra came to Jerusalem, his joy in beholding the new temple and the order of its services, was soon damped by the discovery, that the people, with some of the priests and Levites, were intermarrying and mingling with heathen families in the neighbourhood. The princes, indeed, reported the thing to him, that he, as a well-instructed scribe, might direct what should be done. Ezra discerned at once



the seriousness of the mischief at work. He was filled with grief, and struck dumb. Or, to quote his own words, in true oriental style—"I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice."\*

This thing was ominous, because—

1. It betrayed want of faith in God, mistrust of His protection, when His people sought to strengthen themselves by alliances with the heathen.

2. It transgressed an express command of God in Deut. vii. 3, 4.

3. It paved the way for a relapse into idolatry. In this manner was the wise King Solomon beguiled to folly; and by this familiarity with the worshippers, and then with the worship of strange gods, were the kingdoms of Israel and Judah corrupted and overthrown.

So Ezra sat astonished. It seemed as if the nation had quite forgotten its history, and that all its affliction and captivity had left it no wiser than before. But at last, the good scribe, taking encouragement from the evening sacrifice to spread the matter before the Lord, fell on his knees, and, with the concurrence of the pious Jews around him, poured out a prayer, which is one of the choice portions of this book. It contains no petition, but much confession of sin; and is expressed throughout in a subdued and plaintive tone, harmonising with a period of anxiety

\* Ezra ix. 3, 4.



and struggle. In a spirit of humility, Ezra judged himself and, in his intense patriotism or nationalism, identified himself with his people, even in faults which individually he abhorred. "We are implicated in this sin," he said, "and we have to meet the consequences." No one is responsible to God merely as a unit or individual. Every one is member of some family and of some nation, and carries corresponding responsibilities, moral and religious. Thus a man of God may have to cry—"Our iniquities are increased over our head, and *our* trespass is grown up unto the heavens." It is no excuse, that sins are old and ancestral. Rather it aggravates their heinousness. Ezra confessed that the sin of the Jews in this matter was committed against the admonitions of history, and the commandments of God by His servants the prophets. In this respect, he felt the sin to be a gross insult to Jehovah; and, as one may be ashamed to look another in the face whom he has treated with ingratitude, so the scribe, as confessing the base offence committed by priests, Levites, and people, cried—"O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God."

The prayer was heard in heaven, and repentance was granted to Israel. Ezra led in reformation, as he had done in confession, and insisted on prompt and vigorous measures. The foreign wives, illegally married by Jews, must be put away—not quite unprovided for, one hopes. A severe remedy, hard to flesh and blood; but then the crisis was very serious, and mild measures could not meet the emergency. On the entire separation of Judah to God, depended the character and future fate of the colony. And Ezra deserved well of his nation for having the discern-

ment to apprehend the nature and urgency of the crisis, the piety to confess the fault without guile, and the courage to apply the only sufficient remedy.

This is not the only good service rendered to the people of Judah by Ezra the scribe. The Book of Nehemiah tells of his care to make the people know and understand the law. Tradition ascribes to him the founding of synagogues, the prototypes of our Christian churches. But let us be content with what this book relates. It brings before us a man of study, who was also a man of action, a man of lowly prayer and lofty moral courage. It shows us a type of piety which we do well to consider—a heart trembling at God's word—a sensitive regard to God's will and glory—a profound feeling of the shamefulfulness of disloyalty to Him—and a stringent ideal of the purity and separation from the world, that ought to characterise His worshippers.

Let us confess our sins—not omitting those of our fathers and of our nation. Let us own our perversity and unfaithfulness to God. And what shall we say? Say with Ezra, "O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous. . . . We cannot stand before thee because of this." When we cannot stand, and acknowledge that we cannot, God is gracious to us through Jesus Christ, and grants us forgiveness of sins *in His righteousness*. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."\*

Let us put away the sins we confess. If the Holy Spirit actuates us, and the glory of God is dear to us, we must separate from all that compromises or defiles. No matter

\* 1 John i. 9.

what this costs of present pain, it must be done. Better to cut off a right arm, or pluck out a right eye, than let ourselves be led thereby into sin against God. Confession and reformation—there is no other right way for us, or path of safety. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”\*

\* Prov. xxviii. 13.

## NEHEMIAH.

THIS is, with the exception of Malachi, the very latest book in the Old Testament.

Ezra has told us of the restoration of the temple and divine worship after the return from captivity. Nehemiah relates the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem with its walls and gates, and the re-establishment of the Jews in their land.

The throne of David was not set up again. Both as respects their liberty to worship in a temple, and as respects their civil condition and the restoration of their capital, the Jews continued under the power of the Gentiles. So were they destined to be, till the coming of the Messiah, separate from other nations, but dependent successively on the Persians, Macedonians, Egyptians, Syrians, and Romans. The gallant Maccabees, it is true, obtained the governorship of Judea, but they had to seek the protection of the Romans. After their time, Herod was made king by the favour of Marc Antony and the Roman Senate, but he never pretended to reign on the throne of David. It alarmed him exceedingly, to hear of a Child that was born "King of the Jews." The old royal family had long fallen into obscurity, and was represented in

Herod's time by "a just man," who wrought as a carpenter at the town of Nazareth in Galilee. Alas for Judah! When Jesus was born King of the Jews, He was rejected, and driven away. When Jesus died, He was crucified, with this "accusation set up over His head, This is Jesus the King of the Jews." The Jews said that they would have no king but Cæsar; and so they continue still under the power of the Gentiles, without king, country, or government of their own.

Nehemiah was a man of the good old stamp of Joshua and Caleb—faithful, pious, patriotic, brave. But he raised no standard against the Gentiles. Having understanding of the times, he was content to re-establish the Jews on their own soil, under the protection of the great Persian empire; and he did secure for them that position which, under one or another Gentile protector, they were to hold till the coming of Christ.

We know the names of his father and brother,\* but otherwise have no trace of his parentage or early life. He was born in exile, and was doubtless told in childhood of the distant land of Judea, and the ancient renown of his nation, when they were a people near to God. He grew up with reverence for Jehovah, Israel's God, musing on His promises, grieving over the unfaithfulness that had incurred the captivity, hearing with eagerness of the progress of those Jews who returned under Zerubbabel and Joshua, and longing to take some part in the restoration of the Holy City. As a young man, he was exposed to temptation, for he held a place of honour in the Persian Court, at the magnificent palace of Shushan. But God

\* Neh. i. 1; vii. 2.

kept him in the hour and place of temptation, and nursed within him a heroic national spirit. It has often pleased God to train His servants and soldiers in most unlikely places. While members of some pious households turn out feeble and unprofitable, mighty men for sacred enterprises, and faithful witnesses for times of rebuke, grow up and wax strong in scenes, where one wonders that grace could live at all. Witness Daniel, and the faithful three who feared not the furnace, in the court of Babylon; Nehemiah in the palace at Shushan; Obadiah in the house of Ahab; saints in Cæsar's household.

His place at court obtained for Nehemiah a great advantage—that of the royal sanction and favour for the work at Jerusalem, which he was called of God to accomplish. The heathen king valued him as a good and faithful servant, all the more that he never sought to ingratiate himself with the Persians by conforming to their religion. He was an Israelite indeed. Like Moses in the court of Pharaoh, and Mordecai in that of Ahasuerus, he never forgot that he was of the stock of Israel, and he was deeply affected when he heard of the depressed condition of the settlement at Jerusalem. What was it to him that Shushan was all gaiety, or that the star of Persia was still in the ascendant, if Judah languished, and the gates of Jerusalem lay waste! So he fasted and prayed—the right way to begin any great work for God. In his prayer, he asked that he might find favour with the king, whose heart the Lord could turn as a river of water.

After a little delay, the desired opportunity came. Nehemiah's sad countenance arrested the notice, and excited the displeasure, of King Artaxerxes; for no one was per-

mitted to bring signs of grief into the presence of the Persian monarchs.\* At the gathering frown of the king, the cupbearer "was very sore afraid;" not merely because his life might be cut off at the slightest gesture of a despot, but because the object he had at heart, the restoration of Jerusalem, depended on the good will of Artaxerxes, and might be lost unless he could quickly turn away the king's wrath. Self-possession, however, was given to him in that critical moment; and he answered the king with the utmost respect, but with open declaration of the cause of his distress; pathetically alluding to Jerusalem, as "the city of his fathers' sepulchres." There is a proverb that "the wrath of a king is as messengers of death, but a wise man will pacify it."

Encouraged by Artaxerxes to state his desire, Nehemiah shot up a swift prayer to the God of heaven, and then answered the king, "If it please the king, and if thy servant hath found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it." The request was granted; and Nehemiah got royal letters, and a military escort for his journey to Jerusalem. Ezra, thirteen years before, had not asked for such escort; but then he went as a priest to restore the Temple, Nehemiah, as governor, to rebuild the city.

The journey of Nehemiah was safely accomplished by "the good hand of his God upon him." When he reached Jerusalem, its dilapidated aspect filled him with grief—a grief all the more poignant, that he found the residents apparently contented with, and reconciled to, their condi-

\* See Esther iv. 2.



tion. For three days he stayed in retirement, musing, and doubtless praying. Then, by night, almost unattended, he rode through the city and carefully surveyed its walls and gates. He found only ruined walls, and open gateways, for "the gates were consumed with fire." At last, having his soul filled with patriotic ardour, he addressed the priests, nobles, and rulers, and said, "Come, let us build!"

It was well, that they took encouragement from the Lord their God, for discouragement at once arose from the enemies of Judah. The leaders of opposition were a Horonite (Moabite), an Ammonite, and an Arab, who laughed the project to scorn. It is no bad sign, however, of a work undertaken for God, that it has to bear the jibes of mockers. The new governor of Jerusalem understood this well, and sent at once to the scornful enemies this intrepid reply, "The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we, His servants, will arise and build; but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem."

We have now reached the third chapter of the Book. It contains an honourable register of those who despaired not of their country, but uprose, in a time of feebleness and depression, to rebuild their capital. They were of all ranks and classes. First rose up, as became him, the high priest, with his brethren the priests. The Levites, too, put their hands to the work. Then came the rulers, merchants, "goldsmiths, and apothecaries"—indeed, all the well-doing population of the city. Some of the ladies of high rank showed a fine example at this emergency. The daughters of Shallum, who was "ruler of the half-part of Jerusalem," helped their father in the work. Helpers also

came in from the small towns of Judea, rising superior to all petty jealousies, and preferring Jerusalem above their chief joy. There were a few half-hearted in the enterprise; such as the nobles of Tekoa, who "put not their necks to the work of their Lord." They seem to have been the magnates of a little town, and, like petty great people, in all times, thought it enough to give their patronage. They were exceptions, however, to the general rule. The builders worked with a will, and on a plan which gave exercise to both public zeal and private interest. Every man built over against his own house, or his own chamber, if he were not a separate householder. At the same time, every one was inspirited by the thought that he was filling up his part of a great design for the common good, and for the welfare, not of a gate, or street, or quarter of the city, but of all Jerusalem.

As, when judgment came, God said, "Begin at my sanctuary," so now, when mercy came, restoration began at the sheep-gate, so called, because through it animals for sacrifice were led to the Temple. And so must it always be with a divine reformation in any city or church. It must start from the revival of the doctrine of sacrifice. It must begin at the sheep-gate, and work round to the sheep-gate again.

At the progress of the building, the scorn of the heathen was turned into angry menaces. Some of the Jews began to be seriously alarmed. They were heard to say, "We are not able to build the wall;" and a sort of panic spread. Then Nehemiah showed himself a fit leader and commander. He took vigorous measures of precaution against the adversaries, and fortified the courage of his people, by

bidding them "remember the Lord, great and terrible." Every one who built the wall was to have a sword girt on his thigh. Nehemiah, himself, was to be always in the midst of the workers; and the trumpeter was to stand by him, ready to sound an alarm, or give the signal for an advance. Thus was the panic stayed, and the work went forward.

Our next view of Nehemiah shows him the friend of the poor. Having resisted enemies without the city, he also redressed grievances within. The whole enterprise, in which the Jews were engaged, was endangered by ill-feeling between the rich and the poor. The latter were in great straits, for it was a time of dearth, and had to surrender their lands, and even their children, to rich usurers. The course taken by Nehemiah in these circumstances is not to be discussed on grounds of political economy. The question was not, what is allowable between man and man in transactions, but what was right, at a period of national distress, between members of the commonwealth of Israel. To exact usury of a brother, or countryman, was contrary to the express law of Moses;\* and it was quite at variance with the constitution which God had given to Israel, that the landed possessions of families should be wrested from them in their temporary depression, and that the soil of Palestine should be concentrated in the hands of a few hard-hearted usurers. So the governor rebuked the rich for their rapacity, and, in a public assembly, appealed to them for a generous restitution of the possessions of the poor. The issue was honourable to all. The moral power of love and duty over-

\* Deut. xxiii. 19, 20.

came the evil with good. In ancient Rome, similar strifes between the Patricians and Plebeians, tore the state with dissension, and ended in a bloody war. But in Jerusalem, one grand burst of kind religious feeling swept away the cause of complaint; the rich freely restored the houses, vineyards, and olive yards of the poor; and the people were all brethren as before.

Nehemiah had all the more power in making such an appeal, that his own character was singularly disinterested. His establishment was maintained from his own resources without cost to the people; and he had that princely spirit which loves to give more than to receive, and which shows hospitality without grudging.

“Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” So sang King David; and so it was fulfilled to Nehemiah, immediately after he had regained for the poor their houses and lands. The persistent enemies of Jerusalem, perceiving him to be the ruling spirit, sought to get his person into their power. But all their plots were defeated.

First, they proposed a conference with him in one of the villages. Four times they urged it; but the governor answered well, that he was doing a great work, and could not come down. Then, they tried to deter him by circulating false reports and calumnies; but he cast back their imputations with the boldness of an innocent mind, and turned to God in prayer, that his hands might be strengthened. Their next device was more dangerous. They intrigued against Nehemiah with certain traitors within Jerusalem, and hired false prophets to work on his fears. They knew not, however, the man they dealt with.

He had no fears for them to work upon. He counted not his own life dear to him that he might finish his course with joy. "Should such a man as I flee?" was his answer. Should a man, called of God to such an enterprise, be solicitous and timorous about his own life?

So he baffled his enemies, not by counter-craft or subtle policy, but by integrity of heart and unfeigned devotion to the work of God. And his success was complete. The walls were finished with great despatch, and Jerusalem was in comparative safety. The builders acknowledged, and even their enemies were forced to perceive, "that this work was wrought of our God."

The next thing was to "keep the city." So the governor set watchers and guards. Then he registered the people, that he might know those of pure descent on whom he could rely, and detect such as said they were Jews and were not. The sum of the people agrees with that given in Ezra, 42,360. After the census, a liberal free-will offering was made for the "treasure of the work." Nehemiah himself led the way, presenting munificent gifts. The princes and people followed. The latter were poor but when the rich cast in their gifts, the poor are seldom wanting; and indeed their offerings are usually more cheerfully bestowed, and more proportionate to their means, than the more conspicuous donations of the affluent.

But no walls, or gates, or gifts could really defend Jerusalem. It ought to be a holy city, with the Lord as a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst. So Nehemiah resolved on reviving the knowledge of God in His word, and for this purpose had a great "Bible-reading" in the open air in the street of Jerusalem. The venerable

Ezra brought forth the roll of the law, and stood to read it on a tower of wood erected for the purpose. With his associates and assistants, "he gave the sense" as he proceeded; for the people had become familiar with Chaldee, and had lost in part their proper language, the Hebrew in which the law was written.

By the law is the knowledge of sin, and the people wept when they heard its words. Then Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites were sons of consolation, and bade the conscience-stricken people look to Jehovah their God. So the sorrow was turned to joy. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." The happy feast of tabernacles was then kept in a primitive style, unknown since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun.

But the joy did not—no joy in this world ever does—abolish the obligation to confess sin, or render fasting and prayer superfluous. The 9th chapter describes the service of prayer which followed the reading of the Scriptures. Nehemiah is not mentioned, though we can well fancy him leading the people in their responses. It was the Levites on the wooden stand, who cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God. Their prayer is conceived in the same plaintive strain with that of Ezra, recorded in the 9th chapter of his book. The sad record of Judah's disobedience and rebellion is traced, and their cause left in the hands of the great and merciful God.

After this prayer, Jerusalem prospered. Solemn vows of fidelity to God were made; and a covenant signed and sealed, the first name attached to it being the honoured one of Nehemiah. Thus indeed was the prayer answered, in the zeal with which all the people were moved to vow to the



Lord, and the spirit of consecration with which they were imbued, from the least even to the greatest. The sins into which they had fallen were such as obliterated the distinction between the Jews and other nations—intermarriage with the heathen, profanation of Sabbatic days and years, and exaction from their poor brethren. These sins they now renounced, engaging to keep God's law, and to give and labour heartily for His house and worship.

After this, we read of the settlement of the rural districts,—the rulers and one-tenth of the people occupying Jerusalem itself, which was the post of danger, as well as of privilege. The wall of the city was dedicated with a great public solemnity. Priests, Levites, singers, and players, were there with Ezra their leader. The rulers of Judah had the governor at their head. The trumpets blew. The singers sang aloud. Numerous sacrifices were offered. And all the families in Jerusalem were glad. "The wives also and the children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." This notice of the Jewish families is quite suggestive. Into evil and selfish pleasures, men do not care to take their wives and children. They leave them at home in silence and dulness, when they go out to their revelry. But into holy joys all the members of a family may be freely brought. The women of Israel were never wanting in the celebration of great national events or religious solemnities. And the children of Jerusalem delighted the ear of the Lord Jesus Himself with their sweet hosannas.

What a change in the twelfth chapter from the sadness of the first! What hath God wrought? surely He had visited His people, and blessed the work of their hands.



Yet there was another change for the worse. Alas! what is man? Even when God has set him right, he is sure to go wrong again. It happened that Nehemiah was obliged at this time to return to Persia, and resume his place at court. In his absence, a declension from God began to appear in Jerusalem, and that in two respects—remixture with the heathen, and desecration of the Sabbath. Eliashib the high priest, the very man who should have been the guardian of the sanctuary, actually lodged within its precincts Tobiah, the enemy of the Jews, who was a family connection of his own. Then the Levites and singers went away to the fields, to support themselves by husbandry, and divine service fell into neglect.

When Nehemiah returned and saw this, it “grieved him sore.” But he was no mere lamenter, to content himself with sighs and tears; he was a reformer of the most vigorous type. So he purified the temple. His very approach had made Tobiah flee, and now he cast out after him his “household stuff.” Then he contended with the rulers about the neglect of tithes and offerings, and stopped the traffic which had been permitted on the seventh day, including a Sabbath market which the heathen had actually set up at the gate of Jerusalem. He also repeated the strict measure of discipline which Ezra had previously enforced, insisting on the divorce of heathen wives, whom Jews had illegally married. This he did with a certain vehemence of spirit, recalling the mischief that had followed such intimacy with the heathen on the part of the wisest of their kings. “Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God

made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin."

In regard to these reforms, especially the restoration of tithes and offerings, and the putting away of heathen wives, it is well to read the Book of Malachi, which seems to have been written in, or soon after, the times of Nehemiah, and contends with the same evils in Jerusalem which he so resolutely condemned.\*

Nehemiah's last words are, "Remember me, O my God, for good." The secret of this man's courage and efficiency lay in his habit of prayer, his constant reference to God. Of this we have evidence in almost every chapter. In prayer he formed his plans, defeated his foes, and encouraged and led his people. Praying, he first appears on the field of Judah's desolation. Praying, he last appears on the scene of Judah's prosperity. If at times we are inclined to think that he protests too much of his good motives and good deeds, we should remember that he was exposed to envyings and malicious imputations, and that it was at once his right as a faithful servant, and his needful consolation, to appeal to his God in conscious integrity of heart.†

Praying and working—this is the combination that the Church requires, and that God will richly bless.

"What are we set on earth for? Say, to toil—  
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines  
For all the heat o' the day, till it declines,  
And Death's mild curfew shall from work assoil.

So others shall  
Take patience, labour to their heart and hand  
From thy hand, and thy heart, and thy brave cheer,  
And God's grace fructify through thee to all."

*Mrs. Browning.*

\* See Mal. ii. 11; iii. 8-10.

† Compare 2 Cor. i. 12.

The prominent characteristic of Nehemiah is zeal for God, associated with a tender conscience, fed by a prayerful spirit, and displayed in fearless action. All who hear of him will do well to study such a character. Like him, make and pay your vows in the midst of Jerusalem. Like him, live to God, because you are not your own, but His. Like him, pray and watch, and build. Then fear not for "the God of heaven, He will prosper you."

## ESTHER.

THIS is a book of divine providence. It is written to show how God, without manifesting Himself as He had done in Judea, watched over the Jews in a strange land, and under the power of the heathen. The circumstance at which some have stumbled, that the name of God is not once written in this book, presents no difficulty whatever, when we consider the time of its composition, or the period at which the events related took place. God was then "as a God that hid Himself," yet took cognisance and care of His people whom He had not cast off. And though the name of God is not in the book, His hand is in it everywhere. Such, too, is His manner of operation, that His will is executed through a series of human actions and occurrences apparently quite fortuitous. The charm of the history is this, that while everything proceeds in a manner quite natural, and there is no introduction of miracles or prodigies, all the incidents are so nicely adjusted to the production of the great result, that if one had been wanting, or been otherwise than it was, the whole plan would have been deranged, and the issue could never have been reached.

The time occupied by this story falls in between the

going up of Zerubbabel from Babylon to Jerusalem, and that of Ezra. The Persian empire, in which Babylon was then included, was at its height of greatness, extending from the Indus to the Mediterranean, and from the Caspian to Arabia. The Ahasuerus, who occupied the throne, was most probably the Xerxes of profane history. His winter palace was at Susa or Shushan, and his court was luxurious and extravagant to a degree which we can scarcely conceive.

The story opens with the account of a sumptuous festival, at which the king entertained the satraps from the provinces. It lasted for the enormous period of half a year, the princes, no doubt, coming up from the governments in rotation to partake of it; and it concluded with a banquet that continued for a week, open to all the people in Shushan, great and small. There was no compulsion in regard to wine, but the Persians practised little restraint at feasts, and intemperance was common, with the other vices to which it usually leads. Yet the very revels of the heathen were made to "fall out to the furtherance" of the purposes of God.

A separate banquet was given by the queen to those of her own sex. All went well till the last day of the feast, when it was disturbed by an unexpected and unprecedented summons from the king. He would expose the queen Vashti to the gaze of all his crowd of revellers. It was an outrage on all the customs and proprieties of the age, and could not have proceeded from the king, if he had not been flushed with wine.

So, in every rank of life, every country, and every time, when man becomes intemperate, woman is sure to suffer. She is treated coarsely, her feelings outraged, her delicacy wounded, her rights denied—sometimes her health, her

very life endangered. No doubt, women also fall into this vice; and when they do, no language can describe the degradation. But there is an awful page of human history, though scarcely written at all on earth, minutely recorded on high, and certain to come into judgment. It is covered all over with the sufferings of innocent women and children through the passionate, shameless, intemperance of men.

Had Vashti been of soft and timid nature, she would have obeyed the command at any cost to her own dignity, and then the whole order of events towards the Jews would have been otherwise than it proved to be. But the queen had a firm and lofty spirit that would not brook this insult, or forget what was due to her sex and position, even at a despot's injunction. So she did what must have made all the court minions stand amazed—"The queen Vashti refused to come."

The king was very wroth, all the more because he must have felt that he was wrong. He took counsel with his princes, and they, falling in with his humour, and nursing his wrath, suggested that the queen should be divorced for her disobedience. A certain prince, Memucan, gave plausibility to the advice, by representing that the example of the great is contagious, and that if the offence were not openly and promptly punished, all Persia would soon be full of household insubordination. "And the saying pleased the king."

Every Ahasuerus has his Memucan. Men of rank, wealth, and good worldly position may be sure of flatterers. They hear less downright truth than more obscure people do, and get much less sincere and honest advice. Their

caprices are commended, and their self-will petted to their serious injury. Indeed, whatever our rank or degree in the world or in the Church, we have perhaps no enemy that can do us so much harm as our fluent friend Memucan, whose flattering lips God will yet cut off.\*

The great banquet ended in vexation and wrong. True to its character, the wine-cup at the last bit like a serpent, and stung like an adder. Ahasuerus, when the flush of wine had given place to exhaustion, and the fit of wrath was over, found himself in a dilemma. His word had been hastily spoken, but it was made a decree, and could not be changed. Something like this occurs in other countries than Persia. In rashness or passion, one may easily speak a word, or do an injustice, that can never be recalled or undone. Repentance may come, but it is quite possible for it to come too late.

Again the courtiers gave advice which the king accepted. Their object was to divert his mind from brooding over the injury done to Vashti by their wicked counsel. The plan they suggested for obtaining a new queen is repulsive to our views of propriety, but it shocked no feelings in the realm of Persia; and through even this unseemly device a door was opened for the elevation of a Jewess, and the deliverance of the Jews. Maidens of choice beauty were taken to the seraglio,—among them Esther or Hadassah, an orphan, brought up by her uncle, Mordecai. They belonged to that little tribe of Benjamin which has given to the history of Israel so many famous names. Esther adorned not herself to catch the monarch's fancy, but she surpassed all rivals, and at once became



queen.\* The king's preference was enough, and no question was asked concerning the origin of the beautiful maiden in whom he delighted. Mordecai then received an appointment, for he sat at the king's gate, as Daniel used to sit at the gate of King Nebuchadnezzar. And Esther in her high station obeyed her kind uncle, just as she had done when she was brought up with him.

Soon after this, an incident occurred which had a very important influence on the future course of this history. One of those plots, which have always threatened the lives of despots, was formed against Ahasuerus by two of his chamberlains—probably disgraced officers, or offended favourites. Mordecai, detecting the plot, revealed it to Esther, who at once informed the king. The conspirators were punished, but Mordecai got no reward. So much the better, as the issue of the story shows.

The great interest of the book now opens upon us. A storm began to gather over the unconscious heads of the Jews in Persia, for a favourite, who bitterly hated them, suddenly rose in the king's confidence. It was Haman, an Agagite, or Amalekite, and a thorough specimen of that wicked race. Duke Amalek, their ancestor, was a grandson of Esau; and all his descendants were bitterly jealous of the posterity of Jacob. It will be remembered that they were the first to attack the tribes in the wilderness. From that time, they were a people doomed to ruin; but they continued to struggle against Israel in the days of

\* It is painful to think of the unsuccessful candidates shut up in the seraglio; but, at all events, they were provided for, and not cast out. The greater shame lies on the profligacy of western communities, where the man of pleasure deceives and degrades, then heartlessly casts off his victim to sink into vice or to die.

Gideon and of Saul. When David filled the throne, he made havoc of the Amalekites, only a small fragment of the nation lingering in the wilds of Mount Seir;—and even these were smitten by an expedition of 500 men from the tribe of Simeon, in the days of Hezekiah.

Mordecai, the Jew, seeing the Amalekite courtier, refused the prostration which the other officers of the palace made before him. Haman noticed the slight, and was incensed. Our sympathies go with Mordecai. He may have been too scrupulous about a salutation, but one must admire the sturdy spirit that would not, at whatever risk, pretend to reverence one of the hereditary enemies of the Hebrew race. At any rate, this Benjamite was no puppet to cringe before the favourite of a day.

The scorn of the Jew excited not anger only, but cruel hatred in the Agagite. All his pomp was nothing to Haman, while Mordecai dared to refuse him homage. He resolved on a fearful revenge. He would sweep away, with a sudden destruction, all the hated descendants of Jacob throughout the empire. While avenging himself on the Jew at the king's gate, he would take the opportunity to wreak upon the heads of the Jewish people a bloody retribution on behalf of Amalek. But, as it often is with proud and angry men, Haman, trying too much, overreached himself, and failed.

He went about his plot deliberately enough. First, he sought a lucky day—like those brigands on the Continent, who pray and vow to the blessed Virgin before they descend from the mountains to rob and murder. After some delay, a day was fixed on, and it proved as lucky as Haman could desire; for, when he asked the king's signa-

ture to the murderous decree which he had prepared against the Jews, the careless monarch gave him his signet ring, and bade him do as he pleased. So the decree was issued.

The city of Susa was perplexed. Accustomed though they were to the caprices of their rulers, the Persians were astounded at this relentless severity against the inoffensive Jews who lived and traded among them. But "the king and Haman sat down to drink." Drink again! It was this which led to the unjust treatment of Vashti. Now it hardened the king's heart against the Jews; and this wicked Haman, knowing the king's weakness, plied the wine-cup, and kept the palace gay with luxurious feasts, lest Ahasuerus should come to himself, and discover his folly.

So deliberately planned was the massacre of the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's day, A.D. 1572. It was long pondered by the cruel Catherine. It was she, who persuaded Charles IX. that the time had come to exterminate the Protestants in his kingdom. By feasts and gaities suspicion was disarmed. Then the tocsin was sounded, and 70,000 were butchered in Paris alone, while other places followed the metropolitan example. Rome rejoiced with hideous exultation, and struck a medal in honour of the bloody deed. But Europe, like Shushan, was perplexed and horrified.

The Jews fasted and wept; for, unlike the Huguenots, they had warning of their doom. "Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry." The queen heard of his mourning, and was

grieved, but she knew not the cause. Shut up as women of rank are in the East, they are generally quite ignorant of public affairs. Esther sent a change of raiment to her dear kinsman, to assure him of her sympathy, and to dispel his spirit of heaviness by a garment of praise. Her chamberlain returned with a full explanation of the cause of this sorrow, a copy of the royal proclamation, and a message from Mordecai. It was to the effect, that Esther must for her people's sake avow her Jewish extraction before the king, and obtain their deliverance by intercession.

Here, however, arose a serious difficulty. No one, on penalty of death, might enter, uncalled, the presence of a Persian king. His person was concealed, as if too sacred for men to look upon. Indeed, to this day, it is extremely difficult in Persia, China, and Japan, to obtain an interview with the monarch, all the avenues to his presence being guarded with utmost jealousy.

Add to this, that Esther seemed, just at this time, to have lost her hold on her husband. She had not seen him for a month, while he had abandoned himself to excess of wine with Haman. What if her influence was gone—stolen away by a rival, or undermined by an enemy!

Moved, however, by Mordecai's vigorous exhortation, the queen decided to make an attempt, though it should cost her her life. She prepared for her venture by fasting before God, and inducing all her people to fast and pray likewise, for three days. If she had judged according to the flesh, she would rather have studied how to fascinate the king. But she judged after the Spirit, and put her

confidence, not in attractions of her own, but in the God of Israel.

On the third day, Esther put on her royal apparel, both to show due respect to the king, and because those robes and ornaments were his gifts, and recalled the affection he had shown to her before Haman gained a baneful influence over his mind. Then she left the women's apartments, and made her way to the king's presence. All who saw her must have been amazed; for, if Vashti was degraded for disobeying a foolish word from the king, what danger did not Esther incur by contravening the settled customs, laws, and ordinances of the palace!

The suspense was short, for Ahasuerus at once showed favour to his queen; and surmising, as she drew near, that she had an important request to make, encouraged her to make it. She would not tell it in open court, but invited the king and Haman to a banquet in her own apartments. It was shrewdly done. Esther would re-establish her influence over her husband; and she would throw the favourite off his guard, taking care, too, to have him present when she should unveil his malice, that he might not defeat or escape her. So they came to her banquet; but she deferred her request till the following day, either from a natural reluctance to avow herself a Jewess, or from a quick feminine perception that the best time had not yet arrived for her carrying her point.

Haman went home prouder than ever, for he had got a new step of preferment; he was in high favour with the queen. But it was as if a dagger pricked his heart, when "Mordecai, in the king's gate, stood not up, nor moved for him." By the advice of his wife, a kindred spirit and

meet companion for him, and that of his obsequious friends, the vain-glorious man had a high gallows erected, which he destined for the Jew.

Mordecai slept well that night, unconscious of danger; but the Lord, who kept Israel, slumbered not, and so ordered it in His Providence, that the rage of the heathen was disappointed of its prey. "On that night could not the king sleep." No doubt this had happened before, for sleep is far more secure and sweet to the labouring man than to the voluptuary; but it was of God, that, on this critical night, when sleep fled, the king was disposed, not to vain amusement, but to reflection on the events of his reign. The chronicles of his kingdom were brought forth, and read to him. The Assyrians and Babylonians engraved their records on palace walls, but the Persians used writing materials; and while the former are being disinterred and deciphered in our own generation, the latter have, unfortunately, perished.

In the roll of records read on that night to Ahasuerus, mention was made of the plot against his life, which Mordecai detected and defeated. On hearing it, conscience smote the king: nothing had been done for the preserver of his life; and the Jew had urged no claim, nor sought reward, but sat patiently in his place at the king's gate, because he knew that "promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south; but God is the Judge: He putteth down one and setteth up another."

Ahasuerus, when roused, was full of will and energy. So soon as it was day, he called, "Who is in the court?" Lo! Haman, greedy of revenge, had come already to crave



the death of Mordecai. Before he could prefer his request, he was commanded by the king to lead Mordecai in a procession of honour through the city. What an effort Haman must have made to command himself, and to conceal the secret writhing he endured in doing such a service! Think how he must have felt, as the procession passed the gallows fifty cubits high.

Mordecai showed a sober mind. Not elated by the sudden mark of royal favour he had received, he returned quietly to his post at the gate. But he was confirmed, we may be sure, in faith that God would deliver His people, and he was encouraged to augur well for Esther's intervention.

Haman had gloomy forebodings; and these were increased by the ominous words of his wife, and the prediction of the astrologers in his household, who now perceived him to be a falling star. As King Saul after his warning at Endor, so did Haman go on, with a clouded heart, to his deserved doom.

Esther's opportunity was fully come. The king had been roused from his inglorious servility to Haman, had acted for himself, and in favour of a Jew. Moreover he was quite curious by this time, and anxious to know what lay so heavily on the mind of his queen. Then she disclosed it—told the danger to her life—avowed her nationality, and quoted the very words of the cruel decree. To obviate any jealousy of her interference in the affairs of government, she judiciously added that she would have held her peace had not the matter been one of life and death, though even the reduction of such a people as the Jews to bondage, and of all their prosperous enterprise to



slave labour, would have been greatly to the injury of the empire, and to "the king's damage." How much greater would be the loss incurred by their destruction! So she appealed alike to the king's affection, to his pity, and to his jealousy for the aggrandisement and enrichment of his empire. From the question of Ahasuerus—"Who is he, and where is he that durst presume in his heart to do so?" we infer that he must have been under the influence of wine, or otherwise not himself, when he gave Haman authority to sign and issue the decree against the Jews, for he had no recollection of the circumstance. His question gave the queen the opportunity to unmask the plotter. We can see her rise, with flashing eye, to say—"The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!"

On the gallows, fifty cubits high, was hung the wretched Agagite. The heathen man sunk in the pit that he had made; in the net which he hid was his own foot taken.\*

The Jews, however, were not yet out of danger. When Esther again petitioned the king with tears, to annul the decree against her people, he told her that it could not be done because of the foolish rule to that effect among the Persians; but he made a second decree, so far contradicting the first, as to authorise resistance on the part of the Jews to all who should rise up against them. It was a clumsy device, and one that cost much bloodshed for nought; but the result to the Jews was, that they had "rest for many years."

We do not extenuate the vengeful spirit shown by that people, not excepting Esther herself, in asking for a second day in which to make an end of their enemies, and that

\* Psalm ix. 15.

Haman's sons should share their father's fate. The Jews always were a hot-blooded Eastern race, to whom revenge was sweet. It was not at all congenial to them, to love their enemies, or pray for such as despitefully used and persecuted them. The Jew from whose lips such counsels fell, and in whose character and life they were perfectly illustrated, was no other than the Son of God.

In memory of their great escape, the Jews established a new annual feast—Purim—a festival of joy and mutual gifts, which continues to this day.

The great lesson of this book, as remarked at the outset, is the minuteness and watchfulness of divine providence : but there are also many points suggestive of the ways of grace.

We have in Christ a King of kings, whose "love is better than wine." He spreads a feast for all peoples, and sets the poor with princes. He is faithful without variableness, forbearing and patient without caprice. Far from excluding mourners, He is full of sympathy with such, and counts a broken spirit a pleasing sacrifice. Moreover, He never forgets, or leaves unrewarded, any one who has done service to Him, even to the extent of fetching a cup of cold water to one of the least of His brethren.

Esther first came to the king unadorned, but afterwards in beautiful garments. So the sinner first comes to Christ with no meetness for His presence, and is saved, and united to Christ, without merit, in mere sovereign grace. Afterwards, he comes with petitions and requests, in the new relation to Christ which grace has given him, as one who has obtained acceptance, and may without presump-

tion wear the robe of needlework given by the Saviour in the time of the love of espousals. Our most gracious Prince of Life beholds with delight His suppliant people, extends His sceptre, and grants their request.

The conflict, too, at the end of the book is significant. Enmity against the Church is allowed to grow, and show itself. We often fancy, that God might check or suppress it; but He sees it better to let it develop till the appointed day, when the Lamb and His armies shall overcome, and He who is faithful and true shall judge in righteousness, and make war. Enemies rise up against our souls. We think that the Lord might surely prevent this, and indulge us with a more quiet and tranquil experience. But God knows better how to train us. He lets our enemies rise up against us, and then He gives us a "whole armour" and a sharp sword; He teaches our "hands to war, and our fingers to fight." The end will more than repay all the suffering and strife—"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment"

## JOB.

AFTER the historical books, we have a poem of unique power and beauty—as great a glory to Hebrew literature as Homer's *Iliad* to the Greek, or Dante's *Divina Comædia* to the Italian.

The writer is unknown. Many have conjectured that Moses wrote this book during his sojourn of forty years in Midian; but we lean rather to the opinion of those who ascribe it to one of the poets of that Augustan age in Israel—the times of David and Solomon. It has passages in relation to wisdom, which seem to place it in the same intellectual era that produced some of the Psalms, and the earlier chapters of the Book of Proverbs. In the Hebrew Canon, this poem stands between Proverbs and the Song of Songs, in the last division of the Old Testament, the Hagiographa. One of the most judicious modern writers on the Book of Job concludes as the result of his study, (1.) That “it is the production of a native of Palestine;” and, (2.) That its composition may be dated most probably “at a period not long after the death of David.”\* Dean Stanley confidently derives it from the age of Solomon. “The definition of wisdom is given with a particularity

\* Dr. A. B. Davidson, in the *Imperial Bible Dictionary*. Art. Job.

worthy of the Proverbs. The likeness to the Proverbs of Agur is almost verbal. The allusions to the horse, the peacock, the crocodile, and the hippopotamus are such as in Palestine could hardly have been made till after the formation of Solomon's collections. The questions discussed are the same as those which agitate the mind of Solomon, but descending deeper and deeper into the difficulties of the world. It is the Prometheus, the Faust, as it has been well called, of the most complete age of Jewish civilisation."\*

The date of the authorship of course determines nothing as to the age of Job himself. He may have lived quite as long before the poet who wrote of him, as Æneas did before the poet Virgil. His longevity seems to place him in patriarchal times, for he lived 140 years after his trials were over, and could not have been less than about 200 years old at his death. He was not an Israelite: no allusion is made in the book to Israelitish history; nor is any help derived to the solution of the problem discussed from the revelation that came to the Twelve Tribes through Moses.

The book is intensely religious, but it is not a statement of salvation—it is an investigation of the ways of Providence, and of the connection in this world between sin and suffering, virtue and prosperity. In this it possesses a great element of power, that it handles a problem which has for all times a profound human interest. What basis of fact the poem has cannot well be ascertained. The mention of Job by Ezekiel and James seems to favour the idea of his having actually existed and suffered. Of course, no one

\* Stanley's History of the Jewish Church, 2d Ed. Part ii., Lect. 23.

fancies that men spoke or improvised the poetical speeches just as they are written. What we have is the discussion of a great moral problem, managed by a poetical drama, with “*dramatis personæ*,” but without stage action or thickening plot,—the interest being ethical and psychological, and everything being made to turn on Job’s temptation and discipline. Whether the drama has much, or little, or no foundation of fact, does not affect its use of edifying. The parables of the rich man and Lazarus, the good Samaritan, and the prodigal son, are quite as instructive to the Church as they could have been if they had been strict narratives of fact.

It is very important to carry with us a clear idea of the structure of this book. Take, then, the following plan:—

- I. INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE, in prose. Chaps. i., ii.
- II. THE POEM. Chaps. iii.–xlii. 6.
  - 1. Job’s Complaint. Chap. iii.
  - 2. The Debate, in three cycles.
    - (1.) First cycle. Chaps. iv.–xiv.
    - (2.) Second do. Chaps. xv.–xxi.
    - (3.) Third do. Chaps. xxii.–xxvi.
  - 3. Job’s Second Complaint. Chaps. xxvii.–xxxi.
  - 4. Elihu’s Speech, introduced by a short prose account of him. Chaps. xxxii.–xxxvii.
  - 5. The Lord’s Voice, and Job’s Submission. Chaps. xxxviii.–xlii. 6.
- III. CONCLUDING NARRATIVE, in prose. Chap. xlii. 7–17.
  - I. The introduction or *pröem*, which is in prose, lays

the foundation of the whole poem, and exhibits its problem.

Job was a prosperous chieftain in the Land of Uz, between Syria and Arabia. He was rich in the wealth of the time and country—oxen, sheep, and camels, with the servants required to tend them. His family was large, and his household very great. Best of all, he was a man of the highest character,—“perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil.”

On a sudden, all Job's prosperity forsook him. It is ascribed to the malice of Satan; and the Adversary is represented as appearing in an assembly of the sons of God, detracting from the character of Job, and obtaining permission to prove him by misfortune. The place of the assembly is not indicated at all: and there is no reason to suppose that it was in heaven, or that Satan ever was there, either before his fall or after. He is confined within the atmosphere of our earth, and goes to and fro, and up and down, on its surface. It pleased God to let Satan work his cruel will; and so it fell out that bands of robbers carried off the property of Job and slew his servants, and his sons and daughters perished in an earthquake. It was enough to make his brain reel and stagger, but the good man held fast his integrity. Though he knew not the cause of this sudden and terrible change in Providence, he bore himself with a most touching resignation. “He fell down upon the ground and worshipped and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” We think it a



great matter to repeat these words of submission when we are deprived of one child or one friend; but Job said them when he lost all his children, and was stript of all that he had.

The first assault of temptation had failed; and the Adversary let Job alone for a season—a poor man now and childless, but still a fearer of God. Then came a second trial, introduced in the same way as the first, by a divine permission given to Satan under strict limitation. It is a graphic expression for the working of evil forces in human history, under the control of, and in subordination to, higher and the highest good.

Job was smitten with the disease which we call elephantiasis, and suffered from “sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.” His wife was distracted at the sight of his misery, and said, unwittingly helping Satan—“Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die.” So Eve, beguiled by the Serpent, induced her husband to eat and die. But Job was not as Adam, and did not hearken to the voice of his wife. He expressed his surprise and sorrow that she, hitherto so wise and kind, should speak “as a foolish woman.” “What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? in all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

So failed the second temptation. Though Job was crushed and stunned, he bowed himself meekly before God, and sinned not with his lips. Then a third trial opened upon him;—and it is this which occupies the main body of the book. Three friends of Job, hearing of his calamities, came to condole with him; but their words were more exasperating to that man of sorrows than all

the losses and sufferings he had endured. They were descendants of Abraham, in the lines of Ishmael and Esau. They acknowledged the God of Abraham, and discoursed largely of His providence, but in a temper of mind too rigid for the case before them, and extremely unjust to their friend.

## II. THE POEM.

### 1. Job begins with a most pitiful strain.

"Perish the day wherein I was born, and the night which said, A man-child is conceived." He would not curse God, but he "opened his mouth and cursed his day." So did the prophet Jeremiah pour out his anguish—"Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed."\* The friends were not wise enough to let this burst of grief pass over and expend itself, but began to remonstrate with Job, each in his own characteristic style, Eliphaz with the bearing and sweeping eloquence of a seer, Bildad with vigour enough, but with more limitation of thought, Zophar with heat and vehemence. Then ensued,

2. The grand debate, in three cycles. The friends proceeded on the assumption that calamities befell men only on account of definite acts of sin. In the simple conditions of patriarchal life, it was usual to see the righteous prosper, and the wicked suffer. To Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, this seemed a principle of universal and absolute application; and they therefore held Job guilty of some great misdeed or of utter hypocrisy, and laboured to extort from him a confession.

\* Jer. xx. 14-18.

(1.) In the first cycle of debate, each of the three friends addresses the unhappy chief, and he replies to each in succession, concluding with an appeal from their judgment to God. They assert that the righteous God blesses the just, and punishes the unjust. Job replies that it is not uniformly so seen; that he himself, for example, while just, is made to suffer; and that, in point of fact, the just often endure wrong, and the wicked are allowed to triumph. The philosophy of those Arabian sages was too narrow for the case; and Job, in his last address, told them plainly that they were "physicians of no value," and that he appealed from them to that very God on whose providence they dilated with such confidence. At the same time, he was sore perplexed, for he, like his friends, had been wont to connect all suffering with punishment for sin, and knowing himself free, at all events, from presumptuous sin, he passed through a dreadful intellectual strife and moral agony. "Job's disputing with God is as terrible as it is pitiable. It is terrible, because he uplifts himself, Titan-like, against God; and pitiable, because the God against whom he fights is not the God he has known, but a phantom which his temptation has presented to his dim vision—a phantom in no way differing from the inexorable ruling Fate of the Greek tragedy."\*

(2.) In the second round of debate the friends increase the severity of their tone, and urging as a truth positive and indisputable, that it is the wicked who are scourged and afflicted, assail the integrity of Job. Eliphaz condemns his words as vain and irreligious. Bildad thinks to appal him by describing the destruction of evil-doers.

\* Delitzsch on the Book of Job : Clark's Ed., vol i., p. 242.

And Zophar breaks out into uncharitable accusation and invective. Not one of them has a conception of the mystery of suffering, about which they talk so volubly. Job answers them with scorn. Their arguments are feeble, their apprehensions shallow. In their second round of speech they had improved nothing on the first—had produced no new thoughts, or deeper soundings of reflection, but only more rigour and harshness, and incapacity to comfort. Job denies that the wicked are always punished in this life; they grow old and prosper. And he refuses to submit himself to the admonition of men who have so misjudged him, and shown themselves so unfit to minister to a heavy-laden spirit. So he again lifts his appeal to God—"Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God." His conscience is not yet touched at all. But, resenting false charges, he looks to God for vindication of his innocence;—and, as some golden ray of sunshine may shoot across a dismal cave, so across the discontent and grief of Job shines this confidence—"I know that my Redeemer liveth." But he thought not of a redeemer in the sense of a saviour from sin. It was the Goël that he looked for, the Vindicator, who should raise up his name and cause out of the dust.

(3.) In the third cycle of debate, the comforters are turned into headlong accusers. Eliphaz expresses great truths with wonderful force of language; but truths inadequate, in their application to the case of Job, to explain his suffering. Words the most sound and holy lose their value, and become impertinent and injurious, when they are uttered at the wrong time, or in a wrong spirit, or with

a wrong direction. Job again turns to God, and cries with a bitter cry—"Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Having shown that the wicked prosper, he proceeds to establish it as a fact that the righteous are often oppressed, and to argue that his own afflictions are therefore not to be construed into signs of guilt. Bildad, in a few fine sentences, deprecates what seemed to him the proud self-justification of Job. But the patriarch answers him with scornful impatience, and closes the debate, for Zophar held his peace, with a sublime acknowledgment of the unsearchableness of God. "Lo! these are parts (the edges) of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?"

3. His miserable comforters being silenced, Job poured out his second complaint. He "continued his parable." His monologue was a parable, in the sense of the out-pouring of a mind solemnised and elevated above other minds, and above itself at other times. In the first part of it, he leads on, with great force and beauty of language, to the conclusion that "the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." In the second he bemoans himself greatly, and protests his innocence and integrity. The discussion with his friends had done him no good: they were silenced, but he was more than ever perplexed:—and now "the words of Job are ended."

The interest of all this, which is the main part of the poem, is both moral and psychological. Light falls on the

question started by Satan at the beginning of the story—"Doth Job fear God for nought?" It is fully proved that his piety was not mercenary or selfish, but deep-seated in his heart. At the same time, we have a most skilful delineation of the influence produced in course of the controversy on the mind of the afflicted patriarch himself, exposed as he was to the danger of defying heaven, and casting off all religious reverence and belief; but softened at times and subdued, as with the dropping of a gentle dew from above on his heart, and, with a strange mingling of audacity and plaintiveness of spirit, turning away from his fellow-men to his God.

As the friends condemned Job without cause, he did well to resist them. But, as he made so very sure of his own innocence, and saw doubt and difficulty only in the rectitude of God—thus "making himself more just than God"—he was deeply in fault. Accordingly the poem proceeds, till Job is brought to a conviction of conscience before God, and a lowly sense of sin.

#### 4. Elihu's speech.

The new speaker is introduced on the scene in a few verses of prose narrative. He was younger than the previous debaters, and had listened with the deference due to his seniors. But he was indignant, alike at the self-righteousness of Job, and at the unfounded accusations of the three friends. So he spoke, preparing the way of the Lord—and in words to which Job replied nothing.

It may be observed that Elihu addressed the patriarch by name, which none of the three previous disputants had done. Then, with great flow of thought and speech, he endeavoured to lead this man of sorrows into profitable



meditation on God—the various ways of His communication with men, and the wisdom and justice of His rule over men. He may be said to perform those functions of review and pious reflection which belonged to the Chorus in the Greek tragedy.

At the close of his address, a storm was gathering; and he spoke of lightning and thunder, the snow and the rain-cloud, the whirlwind and the “balancing of the clouds.” While he yet continued to vindicate the Divine goodness and justice, a voice came out of the whirlwind, and it was the Voice of the Lord.

#### 5. The Lord's Voice.

The case having baffled human skill, God came to deal with His servant. He who spoke to Noah, to Abraham, and to Moses, answered Job, in order to convince him of his ignorance, and so of his presumption in calling his Maker to account.

The discourse which is put into the mouth of the Lord—after a manner of which we have examples in uninspired poetry—is in a very lofty strain, and exhibits the poet of this book at his full power. It expatiates on the mighty works of God, the vastness and variety of creation. At first sight it appears a not very direct or suitable answer to difficulties about providence; but it was really the very best teaching for Job, because it expanded his thought beyond the limits of his own trouble, impressed him with a vivid sense of the Divine wisdom and majesty, and thus rebuked his disposition to complain and remonstrate, as if God were a man like himself.

The discourse of the Lord is in two parts. At the end



of the first, Job gives expression to the sense of abasement and insufficiency produced in him by the disclosure of God. He protests that his complaint is silenced. He is "small"—unequal to the task to which God has summoned him—unable to sustain the discussion. "Behold, I am vile (mean or small); what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther." So far well, but Job's conscience is still untouched. Therefore the Lord continues His speech—making nature preach humility to man, and correcting the measure of vain-glory with which Job had asserted his innocence, and the temerity with which he had almost upbraided his God. But the Lord says nothing to crush and exasperate His servant, as the three friends had done. It is better to fall into the hand of God than into the hands of men. In His word, He is patient and kind, and diverts the thought of the sufferer from his own sad case to the contemplation of other objects of Divine care, and proofs of Divine wisdom and might. The result is a perfect success. And the poem closes with the words of Job's lowly confession before God—"I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.—I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job had said that in his flesh he would see God—expecting God to draw nigh in order to vindicate him

against his accusers. But now that he did see God, he only arraigned and blamed himself, and, ashamed of his haughty temper, repented in dust and ashes.

### III. THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK.

This is written in prose to correspond with the introduction.

So long as Job asserted himself, he got no help; but when he humbles himself, he is exalted. Against the three friends he is vindicated as a true servant of God, and no hypocrite or evil-doer. Through his intercession they are forgiven. And, with a fine poetical justice, Job shines out after his heavy cloud of trial has passed away, none the worse for it, but all the better,—surrounded by troops of friends, increased prosperity, and a family quite equal to that which he had lost, seven sons and three daughters—and these the fairest in the land.

“So Job died, old and full of days.” This is a characteristic ending of an Old Testament book, and has no parallel in the New. The literature of the Old Covenant regarded long life on the earth as a great object of desire, and gave no such prominence to heavenly places as belongs to New Testament revelation. Nevertheless, this ancient poem, with the story on which it is founded, has appropriate admonition and inexhaustible teaching for the Christian Church.

The Book of Job speaks to us of—

1. *The Malice of Satan.*—He is most anxious to blacken the character and overthrow the integrity of God’s servants. His assaults are dictated by a mocking spirit which dis-

believes in loyalty of heart to God, and by a cruel spirit always characteristic of him who is "a murderer from the beginning." No servant of God may expect altogether to escape the Satanic malice. There is enmity between the Serpent and the Seed of the Woman according to promise. But, happily, God is able to restrain that dragon; can make his attacks work out, as in the case of Job, a higher good; and, however His people may have to suffer for a time from a bruised heel, the God of Peace will in the end "bruise Satan under their feet."

2. *The secret of patience.*—"Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy"\*—"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit."† The discipline of suffering on the earth is always full of perplexity. There is nothing better than to be still, consider "the end of the Lord," and wait in hope for the unravelling of His merciful design. If we stand in the grace, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, then, and then only, may we even "glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience." Nay, even if we cannot sing in the valley, but pass through it in silence and tears, we shall, if we endure meekly, sing by and by upon the mountain tops, with happy saints—

"All was well, which God appointed,  
All has wrought for good at last."

3. *The foreshadowing of the "Man of Sorrows, acquainted*

\* James v. 11.

† Eccles. vii. 8.

*with grief.*”—All the deep distresses in Old Testament history seem to pour themselves into the deeper distress of Christ. The abandonment of Joseph—the rejection of Moses—the suffering of Job—the afflictions of David—the lamentations of Jeremiah—all point forward to Him who bare our griefs and carried our sorrows—whose “visage was marred more than any man’s, and his form than the sons of men.” Satan plotted against Him; and Satan was baffled and overthrown. Miserable comforters and counsellors wearied Him, but He turned to God, seeking only that His Father should be glorified;—and He was perfected through sufferings. He indeed never opened His mouth, as Job did, to murmur or upbraid. But He did cry to God, and God delivered Him—“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me?—I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn.—Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help.”\*—“In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.”†

Let the meek endurance of Christ cast a tender light backward over the Book of Job, and forward over any tribulation in the world through which Christians have to pass. Remember, too, that the Comforter has come. Under the government of Christ, and the teaching of the Holy

\* Ps. xxii.

† Heb. v. 7, 8.

Ghost, all things work together for your good, who love God. Light afflictions, which are for a moment, work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

## THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

### PART I.

WE have unusually high authority for the title of this book. Our Lord Jesus Christ, and His apostle Peter, alike refer to it as "the Book of Psalms." \* In Hebrew, the collection is entitled *T'Hillim*, praises: in Greek, *Psalmoi*, songs with a musical accompaniment.

We have here 150 lyrical poems, designed for use in Divine worship. They vary, as do all collections of hymns, in beauty and excellence; but all are Divine songs, composed by men that were moved by the Holy Ghost. There are really five Books of Psalms gathered into one. Those five may be distinguished in our Bibles as follows:—

First Book.—Psalms i.—xli.; ending with Doxology and double Amen.

Second Do.—Psalms xlii.—lxxii.; ending in the same way, (with the addition that "the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.")

Third Do.—Psalms lxxiii.—lxxxix.; ending in the same way.

\* See Luke xx. 42; Acts i. 20.

Fourth Do.—Psalms xc.—cvi.; ending with Doxology, Amen, and Hallelujah.

Fifth Do.—Psalms cvii.—cl.; ending with many Hallelujahs.

There is thus a Pentateuch of the Psalms, as well as a Pentateuch of the Law. There is also something like the same variation in the use of the Divine name, in this later Pentateuch, that is found in the earlier. In the 1st, 4th, and 5th Books of Psalms, the Divine Being is usually spoken of and addressed as Jehovah; in the 2d and 3d Books, commonly as Elohim, God.

The Psalter was gradually formed during the times of the kingdom; and even comprises some odes that were evidently written in or after the Captivity—*e.g.*, the 126th and 137th. Chronological order is not carefully observed; but, in the main, the oldest Psalms stand first; the latest, last.

Scholars have differed as to the value of the inscriptions prefixed to the Psalms, so far as respects authorship. They certainly have a higher claim to our confidence than the subscriptions appended to the New Testament epistles; and are entitled, as we think, to a general, if not an absolutely implicit confidence.

About one-third of the Psalms are anonymous, like the sublime poem of Job. Of those which have the name of an author prefixed, one—the 90th—claims a great antiquity, for it is ascribed to “Moses, the man of God.” This has been confidently denied by some of the German critics; but, happily, the Germans answer one another; and others have ably vindicated the Mosaic authorship of the Psalm,



and sustained the claim on internal evidence. To us it seems in every way worthy of such an origin; and its lamentation over early death at three score years and ten, agrees well with what must have been the feeling of Moses, when he saw all the generation that he led out of Egypt falling in the wilderness. Seventy-three Psalms have the name of David prefixed to them. Twenty-four are ascribed to poets of his reign—twelve of these to Asaph; eleven to the sons of Korah, among whom Heman was the most famous; and one, but a very great one, sufficient to make the reputation of any poet, (the 89th), to Jeduthun or Ethan, the Ezrahite. Two Psalms (the 72d and 127th) are attributed to Solomon—and very appropriately, for one is of the Kingdom of Peace, the other of the House of the Lord.

The chief name connected with this book must ever be that of the Son of Jesse. David was “the sweet Psalmist of Israel.” Richly gifted as a poet, finely skilled as a musician, wondrously educated and developed in all his powers by a life of vicissitude and romance, above all, deeply taught of God, and capable of the most profound emotions and most intense ardours of soul, he was the man above all men who ever lived, to compose a Psalter, for the consolation and instruction of such as are spiritual, whether in Israel or in the Church. Then he had so vast a scope of thought and experience, and such a range of spirit from the depths of Sheöl or Hades to the heights of Heaven, that, as one has finely said, “every angel of joy and of sorrow swept, as he passed, over the chords of David’s harp:” and “the hearts of a hundred

men strove and struggled together within the narrow continent of his single heart." \*

Besides the names of authors prefixed, there are other inscriptions to the Psalms. Many have the formula, "For the Precentor," or, as we have it rendered, "To the chief musician." These words, of course, were written when the verses were completed, and given over to the choir master to be set to music. Other titles are given to express the character, or intention, of a psalm. One is for teaching, a second to bring to remembrance, a third for thanksgiving. One is a prayer, another a hymn, a third a song of loves; others are songs of the ascents (degrees), or pilgrim songs. Many of the inscriptions refer to the melody, or to the instrumental accompaniment. Just as we have the names of tunes printed on our psalm-books, so do we learn that the 22d Psalm was originally set to the music known as "Hind of the Dawn," for the afflicted Messiah is likened in that Psalm to a deer compassed by wild beasts and hungry dogs. The 56th was, in like manner, set to "The silent dove in far off lands;" for David sung in it of his wanderings, and his exile in the land of the Philistines. The instrumental accompaniment was carefully selected to suit the character of the Psalm. Thus the 5th was to have flutes; others were with stringed instruments. Selah is doubtless a musical sign—the signal for the intervention of a musical symphony, or of a blast of trumpets, before the voices resumed.

The Psalms may be classified according to their scope and character, thus—

\* Edward Irving's Collected Writings, vol. i., p. 416.

Historical—*e.g.*, 78th, 105th, 106th.

Exultant—*e.g.*, 16th, 47th, 66th, 93d, 96th, 98th, 100th, 103d, and the five Hallelujah Psalms at the close.

Plaintive—*e.g.*, 6th, 13th, 42d, 69th, 88th, 102d.

Penitential—*e.g.*, 38th and 51st.

Admonitory and Didactic—*e.g.*, 37th, 91st, 107th.

The longest of all, the 119th, praises the Law of God, and expresses delight therein. It is very elaborate in its structure, having an acrostic arrangement. It is divided into parts of equal length, each named after a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each verse beginning with the letter of that part. The following Psalms are also acrostic, and they are all of a didactic character too—the 25th, 111th, 112th, 145th. We do not attach any great value to this classification of Psalms, for many will not fall under any one of these categories, having in themselves so much variety—historical allusions, joyful acclamations, plaintive cries, bold appeals, and prophetic gleams of thought.

It may be profitable to consider, (1.) The relation of the Psalter to the Law and to Israel: and, (2.) Its value to the Christian Church, and the esteem in which it has always been held by Christians.

I. It is not all the truth concerning the Psalms, but it is a truth not unimportant, that they were written in the times of the Old Covenant, and originally formed the hymn-book of a people who were under the Law. There is in them Gospel truth, but written by and for those who lived before Gospel times. There is in them spiritual

teaching, with much consolation of grace; but, in the first instance, for persons who were under the law given by Moses, and exercised by trials and fears in that state, though cheered by the favour of Jehovah to Israel, and the earthly calling He had given to them, apart from and above all nations. Accordingly, they begin by declaring the blessedness of him who loves the Law, and throughout they aspire to the full realisation of Israel's calling as the chosen of Jehovah, fearing Him, and exulting in the subdual of other nations, and the destruction of their idols, before the face of Israel. Without doubt, Christ is in them, as we may hereafter show; but it is Christ presented to Israel, either as made under the Law, and suffering as the "One Man who should die for the people," or as the exalted King in Zion, subduing rulers and judges of the earth. There is no Psalm of the Holy Trinity, although an enlightened Christian may trace in the Psalter the doctrine of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. But the praise is given to Jehovah God, for His judgments and His mercy; and Jerusalem is the city of God,—Judah is His pleasant land.

It is no disrespect to the Psalter to remember this. It is what must be expected in an Old Testament book, written when Israel was a people near to God, and the Gentiles were far off, and the calling of the Church had not begun. We fear that, while some love the Psalms for the New Testament truth that is couched in them, a good many love and repeat them rather for that Old Testamentism which is their defect. These persons are themselves under the Law, and have not reached, nor can they appreciate, Gospel liberty. They are servants rather than sons

are religious rather than spiritual, are always struggling for pardon and comfort, not enjoying acceptance and completeness in Christ; so they take the position of a Jewish Psalmist as quite the one for them, and are always in the misgivings of an Old Testament experience, instead of the light and liberty of the New.

So much of the dispensational position of the Psalms. It is the hymnal of a household of faith under law, before grace and truth had come by Jesus Christ. Still this, while true, is not all the truth.

II. The Psalms are invaluable to the Christian Church. They have been used in its service from the beginning, and have been held in the utmost admiration and esteem by Christians of the loftiest strain and largest spiritual calibre. To restrict the Christian Church, either in public or in family worship to the use of the Psalter, would indeed be to commit a great dispensational mistake, and incur serious injury; but it is a still graver mistake and deeper injury to supersede the Psalms entirely by countless hymn-books, or to sing them only in an extremely diluted and enfeebled paraphrase.

The Psalter is really the foundation of all the Christian service of song, and one may add, of a large proportion of the prayer put up by Christian hearts, alike in secret chambers and in public assemblies. In the primitive Church the Psalms were sung. In the fifth century, when the mass of the people were very ignorant of Scripture, the Psalms held their ground, for it is testified that they were committed to memory, and recited or sung "in private houses in market places, and in the streets." No book is

so largely employed in religious service at the present day. It is honoured, of course, in the Jewish synagogue. It has a prominent place in the Roman service of the Mass. It is so arranged in the English Book of Common Prayer, that it may be rehearsed every month. The Church of Scotland, in common with the reformed Churches of the Continent, broke out into psalm-singing at the Reformation, and has never tired of the exercise. The casting of the Psalms into metre, in order that they may be sung to common tunes, is questionable on the score of taste, and is open to other objections ; but it was done by our ancestors, with a good and wise intention of popularising the Psalms. We think it can be easily made out that the Psalms so used have been an inestimable treasure to Churches and nations : and we believe that the Psalter must continue to be a cherished manual of devotion, so long as God has a people on the earth. "The universal Church of Christ hath given its witness that these Psalms are made not for one age, but for all ages ; not for one place, but for all places ; not for one soul, but for all souls ; time, place, and person being only so far present in them as to associate them with that function to which they were first given, not to dissociate them from any other generation of spiritual children which, in after ages, was to be born to the same Spirit by the seed of the Word, which liveth and abideth for ever." \*

It is interesting, too, to observe how firm a hold the Psalter has taken of the most eminent Christians. Athanasius and Chrysostom delighted in them. Ambrose of Milan says, "Although all divine Scripture breathes the

\* Edward Irving's *Collected Writings*, vol. i., p. 410.



grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms." By a Psalm was Augustine consoled at his conversion, and on his death-bed. At the time of the Reformation, both Luther and Calvin showed a high esteem of the Psalter, wrote upon it at length, and took pains to bring it into popular use. The former called it "a little Bible, the summary of the Old Testament." The latter says in the preface to his Commentary, "I have been wont to call this book, I think not inappropriately, an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Nay, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting agitations with which the minds of men are wont to be tossed. This book makes known not only that there is opened up to us familiar access to God, but also that we have permission and freedom granted to us to lay open before Him our infirmities, which we would be ashamed to confess before men. Further, we are here accurately instructed as to the right manner of offering to God the sacrifice of praise, which He declares to be most precious in His sight, and of the sweetest odour." Bishop Jeremy Taylor found in this book "so many admirable promises, so rare a variety of the expressions of the mercies of God, so many consolatory hymns, the commemoration of so many deliverances from dangers, deaths, and enemies, so many miracles of mercy and salvation," that he felt persuaded "there could come no affliction great enough to spend so great a stock of comfort as was laid up in the treasure of the Psalter."

But who shall tell how many obscure Christians, un-



known to earthly fame, but dear to God and written in heaven, this book has taught and comforted? Nay, who is a Christian at all—who has any measure of spiritual discernment and sensibility, and does not love the Psalter? Not only so, but you, who value the book as a whole, are almost sure to have your favourite psalm or psalms, that seem always to strike an answering chord within your breast. Is it the 8th, that song in the night of the Son of man? or the pastoral which every one knows—the 23d—a song which one has called the nightingale of the psalms—“small and of a homely feather, but filling the air of the whole world with melodious joy?” Is it a song of Messiah—the 2d, 22d, or 110th? Is it the plaintive trustfulness of the 42d, and 43d? Is it the song of the great marriage (45th), or of the kingdom (72d), or of the vineyard (80th)? Is it the sublime hymn of the covenant (89th)—the odes of gratitude (103d and 116th)—the celebration of God’s works (104th), or of His omnipresence and omniscience (139th)? Or, what think you of the ringing hallelujah psalms that conclude the whole Psalter, as some master-piece of music ends with full clear resounding notes, that fill the ear, and swell the soul? Nay, be not too partial; step not from one favourite psalm to another, but go through the book in detail, and you will find that through field and flood, over the hills of Bashan, and down into shaded valleys, now far off in the desert, now in the deep with rolling billows, and now in the meadows by the margin of still waters, you are led in repentance, faith, self-conquest, patient endurance, and holy aspiration, onward to the joy of the ransomed of the Lord, and the ecstasy of heavenly praise.

Wherever the gospel spreads and prevails, it produces singers of "psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs." With the preachers of that gospel, the Hebrew bards are at this day going through the earth in every speech and language. Their words bring God and man together in Christ. They chase away griefs and fears ; pour strong stimulus of courage into the breast of good soldiers of Christ, and balm of consolation into the hearts of the sick and the poor, desolate widows, and orphans in their loneliness.

Sing, O Christian ! on your heavenly way. Let God be extolled both in the sanctuary, and in the firmament of His power. "Let all breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah."

## THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

### PART II.

HAVING spoken of the form and arrangement of the Psalter, and generally of its position in Israel and its value for the Church, we propose briefly to examine its contents, as a theological and prophetical book. It is a very notable circumstance, that our Lord Jesus Christ referred to or quoted nine psalms—the 8th, 22d, 31st, 41st, 48th, 69th, 82d, 110th, and 118th:—and the evangelists and apostles quote no fewer than thirty-three of them. A book so honoured in the New Testament evidently possesses peculiar claims on our study. We shall try to classify its principal teachings.

I. *Its Doctrine of God, or Theology proper.*—Although the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are in the Psalms, the time had not come for the teaching of the doctrine of the Trinity, or for the proclamation of the Divine name as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. To the Hebrew poets, as to the Hebrew historians and annalists, Jehovah was God, in contrast with the worthless gods of the heathen. Before Hesiod wrote his “Theogony,” or Homer sang of

the gods and goddesses warring in the conflicts of men, the bards of Israel had struck a nobler key, and sounded the praises of one Almighty God, supreme in heaven and in earth. "All the gods of the nations are idols (nothings): but Jehovah made the heavens."

God is revealed and lauded in His various attributes. He is, in the Psalter, the living God—most high, holy, good, gracious, merciful, and mighty. His glory in the creation is celebrated in some of the finest lyrics within the collection. But there is no hiding of His personality, or reducing the Creator to an abstraction—to a name for nature, or a supreme law of existence, and order of things. He who made the heavens and the earth is always identified with the God of Israel, and extolled as the King in Zion. The psalmists shout for joy before Him, and call on the very trees of the wood to clap their hands.

The figure of speech, by which God is described under the form, and appears to possess the parts and feelings of a man, is, as might be expected, largely employed in the Hebrew poetry. Men hear the voice of God, and see His glorious marchings; are cheered by the light of His countenance, or troubled by the hidings of His face. He goes up with a shout—rides on a cherub—sits in His temple—flies on the wings of the wind. He opens His hand to feed His creatures, and stretches out His arm to help His people. A psalmist appeals to God for interposition in the boldest language—"Pluck thy right hand out of thy bosom. Arise, why sleepest thou, O Lord."

II. *Doctrine of Christ, or Messiah.*—No Christian can doubt that some of the Psalms are Messianic, or prophetic

of Christ, on some principle, and to some extent. No otherwise can a believer in the New Testament understand such Psalms as the 2d, 8th, 22d, 45th, 72d, and 110th; and besides these, devout Christians have been wont to perceive in all parts of the Psalter, if not a continuous strain, at all events snatches as of a distant melody, singing of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow. It is a question, however, fairly enough under discussion, on what principle Psalms in whole or part are Messianic, *i.e.*, whether they are direct predictions of Jesus Christ to come, or indirect, in this sense, that they are originally and properly written of David or Solomon, and are found applicable to Christ, because David and Solomon were types of Him. To us it appears that these theories are not so opposed as to exclude each other, and there is no reason why both should not be true. The latter explanation best suits some of the Messianic passages, especially those contained in Psalms—as the 40th and 41st—which cannot be applied in whole to the undefiled Jesus, because of their confessions of personal sin. But there are others—especially those mentioned above, the 2d, 45th, 72d, and 110th—which require the former theory, and are most naturally interpreted and easily understood as direct prophecies in the Spirit of the Messiah-king.

Christ is set forth in the Psalms in His two states of humiliation and exaltation. The 22d traces the former down even to the dust of death, and then anticipates the latter with hopefulness and joy. The 109th and 110th are a pair, the former dealing with the sorrow and suffering of Christ, the latter with His elevation and power, while seated as Priest-king at Jehovah's right hand. The

2d, 16th, and 118th speak of His resurrection—the first of these celebrating His being begotten again from the dead, and so declared to be the Son of God.

Then we have glorious things spoken of the covenanted supremacy and kingdom of Christ. A covenant was made with David concerning the succession of his children on his throne. The promise of that covenant was the Gospel of the period. To it clung the faith of the godly in the land, despite the folly of David's children, and children's children. The covenant was well ordered and sure. The promise was of a son of David, who should have universal dominion and a throne for ever and ever. Solomon was not that son of David, for it is he who, in the 72d Psalm, sings of Him as yet to come, and to have supremacy far beyond the bounds of Israel—"from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." It is a song of Christ, who shall sit on the throne of His father David. He is "the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning Star."

The 45th Psalm is "concerning the King." Allow as much as we may for oriental splendour of diction, it is impossible to interpret this Psalm with satisfaction of the nuptials of Solomon or any Jewish king. A greater than Solomon is here—One beautiful beyond the children of men, and destined to reign as God for ever and ever, with a sceptre of righteousness. Gracious in speech, He is both great in conquest and just in ruling over men. To Him is the Church brought in holy beauties, as a bride adorned for her husband. He is her Lord, and she bows herself before Him. The Psalm is in perfect accord with that which Christians have for so many centuries been wont to

say and sing—"Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ; thou art the everlasting Son of the Father!"

III. *Doctrine of Antichrist and enemies.*—Not only does Christ look out on us from the Psalter with the health of His countenance, but Antichrist too, with his "stout look" and cruel pride. "The enemy" of David is, in a figure, the enemy of Christ—the lawless one, the son of perdition. Then the false witnesses, the traitors, and the wicked who rise up against David, are the false accusers, and the Judas Iscariot, and the proud and bitter adversaries of Christ.

This accounts largely, though not entirely, for the minatory language of many Psalms—denunciations of terrible wrath, and prayers for vengeance. Five in particular—the 7th, 35th, 58th, 69th, and 109th—are so full of imprecation, that we may be pardoned if we read parts of them with bated breath and a faltering lip. We have known persons who could read, and even sing, such passages comfortably enough. It was because they had trained themselves to apply them to unseen spiritual enemies, evil principalities and powers around them, or sinful dispositions within them, warring against the soul. But, after all, this is only a process of accommodation, and evidently fails when we come to such language as the following, "Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg. Let his posterity be cut off, and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out." It is a thorough oriental impre-



cation, seeking to sweep away a whole family for the sin of one man.

It is true that this vengeance is invoked on the head of the betrayer of Christ: and we may profit by reading even the severest of the passages to which we now refer, when we regard them as dictated by a burning zeal for the honour of Jehovah, a righteous indignation and a jealousy of love, and generally, if not universally, as denunciations of just judgment against the obstinate enemies of Christ, and all who obey not the Gospel of God. At the same time, these passages cannot be fully accounted for without a frank recognition of the fact that the Psalter was conceived and written under the Old Covenant. That dispensation was more stern than ours. God's people had with all other peoples a conflict of sword and spear. They wanted to tread down their enemies, to crush the heathen; and thought it a grand religious triumph for a righteous man to wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.\* Now, the struggle is without carnal weapons, and the tone of the dispensation is changed. We admit that there are instances of imprecation in the New Testament—in the words of St. Paul, that Hebrew of the Hebrews. He said to the High Priest, Ananias, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall:" he wrote to Timothy, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil; the Lord reward him (a very probable reading gives 'shall reward him') according to his works." The same apostle writes to the Corinthians, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." But, as a recent writer on the

\* Ps. lviii. 10; lxviii. 23.

Psalms has well observed,\* these expressions of St. Paul are very different from the deliberate and carefully constructed anathemas of the Psalter; and then, they are only the sayings of one man, not put into the mouth of the Church, as the severest passages in the Psalms were put into the mouth of Israel. For our own part, we cannot harmonise the curses in this book with the mind of Christ, or the spirit of the Gospel. And why should we attempt it? James and John had the spirit of Elias, when, in zeal for Christ their master, they wished to consume a Samaritan village that rejected Him, with fire from heaven. The spirit of Elijah became a prophet of God in that old time, but it is not appropriate to the disciples of Christ. "The Son of Man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." To point out this distinction is not to disparage ancient Scriptures, but simply to note that progress in revelation which God has seen best for His own glory, and for the moral and religious education of His people. It is not to depreciate the ancients who were pious, but only to say that they lived according to the light given in their day—which is all that could be said of the pious now. To take the opposite course, and ignore this distinction, in order to make out that Moses, Samuel, David, and Elijah were Christians, is to confuse everything. It is of a piece with the medley of interpretation which identifies Israel with the Church, and the earthly calling with the heavenly; and it hinders the Christian cause by binding it to the defence of things that, however they may have been per-

\* Rev. Prof. Perowne on the Book of Psalms, 2d ed., 1870, by whose excellent work I have been much assisted in this and the previous lecture.

mitted once, cannot be defended or justified now. By all means we should learn from the ancients sturdy moral earnestness, and hatred of iniquity; but we are not the followers of the man who wrote of his enemies, "Let the angel of the Lord chase them; let their way be dark and slippery; and let the angel of the Lord persecute them."\* We are the disciples of Him who, while He hung tortured on the cross, said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

IV. *Doctrine of Divine Providence toward the Godly.*—Take the 37th Psalm as one of the Divine ordering of man's lot upon the earth—the perplexities of the pious, the reward of their patience. In the eyes of those who feared Jehovah, the prosperity of ungodly men was a great anomaly. We do not so much wonder at it, because we take the future after death fully into our view. But the ancients, not having that future so clearly revealed, thought more than we do of retribution in the present life, and became much perplexed, and even impatient, when they did not see temporal recompense assigned to the righteous, and palpable judgments inflicted on the wicked. The Psalmist, however, had such a perception of the large scale on which God governs, and of the infallible certainty with which good and evil work out their own results, that he could, in full view of all perplexities about Providence, sing of patience, confidence—nay, of delight in the Lord. One can imagine the comfort with which a right-minded Israelite, suffering affliction or calumny, recited or sung this great Psalm of David—or the 73d, by Asaph—learn-

\* Ps. xxxv. 5, 6.

ing to "trust in God, and do the right," to be still, and wait the Lord's time. "For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not His saints; they are preserved for ever; but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off."

There is little to be added to this in the New Dispensation; indeed nothing, but that recompense and retribution are more clearly seen to range over the world to come, as well as the world that now is; and that Providence is placed under Christ for the good of His Body the Church. We have to take a wider horizon for our patience, and to see Jesus invested with all power in heaven and earth; and then we find no book of the Bible so helpful and consolatory in affliction as the Psalms. Our best Christian hymns of Providence can say no more than did these Hebrew Psalms, nearly three thousand years ago—

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain."

V. *Doctrine of Forgiveness of Sins.*—The teaching of the Psalms on this subject is exactly the same as that of New Testament Scripture. Forgiveness is with God. It is bestowed of His free grace, and for His name's sake, on those who confess, and desire to forsake, sin. And it is a present forgiveness, assured to the conscience by God's word—cleansing the soul, and clearing the sinner from every charge of guilt.

The Divine pardon of an Israelite was in virtue of the great Propitiation for sins—the death of Christ—the same ground on which we are forgiven. Christ suffered for the remission of sins that were past: and God, in blotting out

transgressions during the ages before He came, had respect to the future Atonement, even as in the present age He has respect to the Atonement which was accomplished long ago upon the Cross. David saw this with some degree of clearness when he said, "Purge me with hyssop,"—in allusion to the bunch of hyssop at the end of the rod of cedar-wood, used under the Mosaic law to sprinkle blood and water on the defiled. He knew that the forgiveness of sins requires sin-offering—and we presume that he in the Spirit saw afar off the precious blood of Christ. But the essential point is, that God had respect to that perfect offering.

What the 37th Psalm was to the pious in perplexity, the 32d must have been to Hebrew penitents. It tells of transgression taken away, as an intolerable burden is removed; of sin covered, so that the sinner is before God's judgment as if he had not sinned at all; and of iniquities not reckoned to the worker thereof. This it is, which St. Paul quotes in one of his chief arguments on justification, "David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works."\* The non-imputation of iniquity is taken to imply the imputation of righteousness.

There is great encouragement in the personal character of what is said in the Psalms on forgiveness. Just as we love to hear Paul say, "I obtained mercy," so must we be glad of David's avowed experience of the blessedness of pardon. He who delivered the doctrine of Divine forgiveness, had proved it true. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the

\* Rom. iv. 6.

iniquity of my sin. For this, shall every one that is godly pray unto thee."\*

VI. *Doctrine of Integrity of Heart.*—With all their sharp sense of sin, the Psalmists had a habit of affirming their own uprightness and integrity, which is strange to us, and has been even charged with savouring of over-confidence and self-righteousness. We refer to such passages as the following—"Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity."—"I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. I was also upright before Him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His eyesight."†

We might not volunteer such statements, because the light has become more searching since the sojourn of Christ on earth, and the descent of the Holy Ghost to convince of sin. But no apology whatever is needed for the language of the Psalmists. It proceeds not out of any unseemly arrogance, but from "the free and princely heart of innocence." It is the childlike joyful declaration of conscious integrity of purpose, and uprightness of heart toward God, as against all imputations of dissembling and hypocrisy. St. Paul, indeed, had the same rejoicing in the testimony of his conscience, to his own "simplicity and godly sincerity."‡

The lesson to us of such passages is, that we ought to have "love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." They urge us, as followers of the Son of

\* Ps. xxxii. 5, 6.      † Ps. xxvi. 1; xviii. 21-24.      ‡ 2 Cor. i. 12.



David, to draw near to God in the holiest with "a true heart." If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us.

VII. *Doctrine of Resurrection and a Future Life.*—We must take care not to depreciate the consolation and hope of the ancient believers; yet we can see plainly that the recognition of a future life was gradual among the people of God. It is true that Abraham, seeing the day of Christ afar off, had also the conception of the resurrection of the dead, and looked for a better country, that is, a heavenly. This, however, we learn from the New Testament.\* It was not so read by the children of Israel: and, for all that appears in Genesis, Abraham saw nothing beyond death. Jacob and Joseph gave commandment concerning their burial in Canaan, but said nothing of a happy future. Moses was equally silent. Joshua merely said, "I am going the way of all the earth." David and the sacred poets began to utter the hope beyond the grave that cheers the just. In the Prophets, it became clearer still. And long before our Lord's time, the belief in resurrection and future life was well established among the Jews; and those who rejected that belief were called the sect of the Sadducees.

The object of the Psalter was to cultivate friendship with and trust in God, as the present duty and the highest good—taking little account of a hereafter. We know from the New Testament, that the 16th and 118th Psalms foretold the resurrection of Christ; but no one can tell how far those who sang the Psalms saw into the truth which

\* Heb. xi. 9-19.



the Spirit signified. Of the wicked after death, it is only said they shall be cast into Sheol or Hades. Of a life to come for the godly, there is no very clear or definite statement. David, in the 23d Psalm, speaks of dwelling "in the house of the Lord for a length of days," but whether before or after death does not appear. Later Psalms tell of mercy enduring for ever, and of "life for evermore." \* But a future life, or a heavenly home, plays no such part of consolation in the Psalter as it does in a Christian hymnal. As a matter of course, every Christian using the Psalms supplies those considerations and hopes which he has imbibed from later revelation. We read the Psalter in a Christian sense, as respects all its doctrines, but we do not suppose that it possessed that sense for ordinary minds in Israel. The book is part of a progressive revelation, and carefully adapted to the time in which it appeared, while it is so written as to be profitable to all saints, and to be capable of being transfigured by a spiritual Christian mind into a hymn-book of the most evangelical faith and the most heavenly hope of glory.

To us the very exercise of praise suggests the life to come, and the happy land. No willow-trees are there on which to hang the harps, no sorrow there, no sense of exile, no sickness of heart, no faint or faltering note. There are psalms for merry hearts in heaven always, and melody for ever around the throne of God and the Lamb. What infatuation it is to lose so great a joy for some short-lived pleasure of sin! "Woe unto you that laugh now: for ye shall mourn and weep. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh." † Come to Christ with tears,

\* Ps. cxxxiii. 3.

† Luke vi. 21, 25.

that you may not weep bitter tears too late when He bids you depart, but may come to Zion with songs, and join the company of

“Saved souls and angels sweet  
Who love the God of love.

“They love, they praise ; they praise, they love,  
They ‘Holy, Holy’ cry ;  
They neither toil, nor faint, nor end,  
But laud continually.”

## THE PROVERBS.

AFTER the feeding of devotion in the Psalter, this book comes in well for admonition and guidance in practical life. If it is good to see how the Bible nourishes a fervent spirit, it is also good to see how it recognises steady principle, and smiles on sobriety, discretion, and shrewdness of mind. The Psalms are to thrill and animate the heart, the Proverbs to direct the way that we should take. This book does not deal with the salvation of a sinner. It has no word whatever of redemption, propitiation, or justification. It relates to our walk on the earth, applies heavenly principles to that walk, and warns us not to play the fool.

The word translated "Proverb" is sometimes rendered "Parable." Its essential idea is that of teaching moral or spiritual truth by comparisons. This was done by the eastern sages, sometimes in concise pregnant sayings or proverbs, sometimes in a more lengthened similitude or story—the parable. The wisdom of Solomon preferred the former method. It was the manner of his mind to express his philosophy of life in short, pithy sayings that are easily grasped by the memory, while, with their sharp points, they penetrate the soul. The writing of such pro-

verbs was favoured by the parallel structure of Hebrew poetry, holding the truth neatly and firmly, as one\* has happily said, "forceps-fashion, between the points of an opposing antithesis."

The proverbs of the Gentile nations are almost all of anonymous origin—concentrations of many men's wisdom, or expressions of a popular humour, or national turn of thought, floating down, in the concise form of the apothegm, from an unknown antiquity. But almost all the proverbs of the Hebrews are due to the wit and wisdom of one man whom God had specially endowed.

David was not more thoroughly trained to be the Psalmist of Israel than Solomon was qualified to be the Master of practical admonition. The one had his native genius and sensibility developed in a chequered and romantic life, as well as his spirit moved by the Spirit of the Holy One. The other had no boyhood among the sheep, or refugee experience in dens and caves of the earth. From the first he had every princely advantage; he acquired every accomplishment of science and letters; and, gifted with extraordinary powers of observation, he knew human character and life thoroughly, and could describe what he knew with wonderful terseness and point, his spirit also being enlightened by the Spirit of the Lord. It is true that Solomon himself sinned against moral integrity, and the wise man played the fool. Probably he wrote this book before his fall; but even if it were not so, David's sin did not disable him from writing psalms,—rather was over-ruled to make the Psalter more complete in its adaptation to human want; and Solomon's sin, espe-

\* Dr. James Hamilton.

cially if it were repented of, could not disable him from writing of morals and wisdom. One thing is well worthy of remark, that not a line from Solomon's pen palliates Solomon's faults. On the contrary, he is the most vehement of all the sacred moralists against those things by which he was himself ensnared.

The Proverbs of Solomon are in three divisions :—

Nine chapters, i.—ix.—Addressed chiefly to the young.

Fifteen do., x.—xxiv.—More various, and addressed to all ages and ranks.

Five do., xxv.—xxix.—A later collection made by Scribes under the orders of King Hezekiah, from extant records of the wisdom of Solomon.

All these are characteristic of the mind and times of that great monarch. They have his piercing wit, and all that lofty esteem of wisdom which he evinced from his childhood. They deal with the dignity and duty of a king; expose the perils of flattery, luxury, and pride; and abound in allusions to nature, to the habits of the lower animals, and to the lessons of human experience, such as we might expect from a famous naturalist, and from the most large-minded man that the Hebrew race produced down to the Christian era.

There are added two appendices.

The words of Agur fill the thirtieth chapter. They are entitled his "prophecy," or rather burden, or weighty deliverance. Of this sage nothing whatever is known. The fragment is full of those enigmatical, almost paradoxical, sayings, and religious riddles, so congenial to the eastern mind.

The thirty-first chapter contains the words of Lemuel the king, probably an Arab prince. It is an oracle which his mother taught him. It contains good advice for a king, and the description of a virtuous woman at the head of her household. In style it is scarcely proverbial, and has no antithesis; but the latter part of it has the acrostic peculiarity which necessarily escapes the English reader. The verses, from the tenth downwards, begin with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet in regular order.

From the miscellaneous nature of its contents, it is impossible to give a thoroughly comprehensive synopsis of this book; but we may gather into groups the warnings it delivers against prominent evils, which, if they prevailed in Solomon's time, are only too frequent and familiar still.

I. *Filial Impiety*.—Refer to Chaps. i. 8, 9; vi. 20, 21; xiii. 1; xv. 20; xix. 26; xx. 20; xxiii. 22; xxviii. 24; xxx. 17.

In the law of the Ten Words delivered from Mount Sinai, the obligation to honour parents was placed first after duty to God. It underlay all morality in Israel. It underlies all morality still.

Solomon seems to have been greatly impressed with this. He had himself been dutiful, both to his father David and to his mother Bathsheba: but he had seen heavy woes on his father's house through the insubordination of sons. Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah had all come to a bad end, and caused their father David sorrow and shame. Probably, too, Solomon had misgivings in regard to his own son Rehoboam, the heir-apparent, who

neither inherited his father's discretion, nor observed his counsels.

When St. Paul describes the shocking depravity of the heathen world in the first century, he lays stress on the circumstance that men were "disobedient to parents."\* He mentions the same evil as destined to characterise the perilous times in the last days.† Yet the heathen, at their best, held filial piety as a virtue in high esteem. It has always been so reckoned, even to excess, among the Chinese. The Greeks and Romans called Æneas "the pious," and held him in honourable remembrance because he bore his father Anchises on his shoulders from the flames of Troy. Many instances might easily be cited, to prove that love of parents stood in honour next to love of country. And it is quite in keeping with this, that our greatest poet excites our horror of filial impiety, as shown in the fabled days of King Lear, who was a heathen, and apostrophised the gods.—

"Ingratitude ! thou marble-hearted fiend,  
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child,  
Than the sea monster !  
    Sharper than a serpent's tooth it is,  
To have a thankless child."

Holy Scripture recognises the natural affection, and strengthens it by the religious sense of duty. It bids children "obey parents in the Lord, for this is right." At the same time it admonishes parents to justify and strengthen their claims upon their children, by kind treatment, and godly upbringing in Christ.‡

\* Rom. i. 30.

† 2 Tim. iii. 2.

‡ Eph. vi. 1-4.



II. *Evil Company*.—Refer to Chaps. i. 10-19; iv. 14-19; xiii. 20; xxiv. 1, 2; xxix. 24.

This class of admonitions has great urgency for young people. As we grow old, we become more reserved, perhaps suspicious; but youth, with its small experience and its strong desire for companionship, is in great danger of being enticed by unworthy associates, and of being injuriously influenced by them. My son! consent thou not. It matters not to the cattle of the field, what company they keep in grazing the meadow for a few short years; but it matters much to thee, what associates are permitted to affect thy character for time and for eternity. Respect thyself, and so fear God, that thou canst have no companions who do not also fear Him. The heathen were not unaware of the danger of ill-companionship; for it is a heathen poet whom St. Paul quotes, when he writes to the Corinthians—"Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners." The Hebrew poet says more explicitly—"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

III. *Licentiousness*.—Refer to Chaps. ii. 16-19; v. 3-20; vi. 23-35; vii. 6-27; xxii. 14; xxiii. 27, 28. These passages we cannot dilate upon; but they ought to be read in private and gravely pondered. Solomon calls the harlot the "strange woman," or foreigner; for, from the days of Balaam, when, at his foul instigation, Midianite women beguiled the men of Israel to sin, female influence had again and again brought the immoral festivals and orgies of the heathen into Palestine; and it was by foreign wives and concubines that the wise king himself was be-

guiled into folly. Alas ! the harlot is a frequent object in our streets, and presents a constant danger to the souls and bodies of our young men, which they cannot quite escape without much self-control, vigilance, and prayer. These shameless women are in part foreign, but the greater number are native, including some of the fairest daughters of sweet rural parishes, and hopeful pupils of Sunday Schools. No doubt, most of them were first entrapped and beguiled by wicked men as seducers ; and the male sex has to bear the heavier share of criminality in this whole matter ; but women take a terrible revenge when they turn seducers, and draw men by their passions secretly and stealthily down to disgrace, disease, and death. "She hath cast down many wounded ; many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death."

IV. *Untruth*.—Refer to Chaps. vi. 16 ; xi. 1-3 ; xii. 13, 14, 21, 22 ; xiv. 25 ; xix. 5-9 ; xx. 17 ; xxi. 6 ; xxvi. 24-28.

These sayings accord with that fine sentence in the Psalms, "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness ; His countenance doth behold the upright." Nothing can be more clearly laid down than this : that God requires truth on the lips, and justice in the balance ; and that the opposites, untruth and dishonesty, God abhors. This doctrine, so clearly stated, needs to be strongly pressed upon conscience ;—for, almost more than the breach of chastity, the breach of integrity, the use of deceit to gain a worldly advantage, or elude a worldly loss, has left a sad blot on the character of many Christians, as well as Jews, and enfeebled the moral influence of the Church. On the young

Christian community of the Thessalonians it was urged by St Paul, "that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter; because that the Lord is the avenger of all such."

V. *Sloth*.—Refer to Chaps. vi. 6-11; x. 4, 5; xiii. 4; xv. 19; xix. 24; xxi. 25, 26; xxiv. 30-34; xxvi. 13-16.

The moralists of every country have reproved sloth and commended diligence, but Solomon has excelled them all. He upbraids the sluggard with his folly, bidding him learn at the busy ant-hill, and shows him the mischiefs that he incurs—disappointment, decay, and poverty. "Drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls the slothful servant, who hid his master's money when he should have traded with it, a "wicked and slothful servant." St. Paul is emphatic on diligence, alike in the outer and the inner life. The Roman Christians he exhorts to be "not slothful in business." To the Thessalonians he writes very plainly—"When we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now, them that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread." In regard to spiritual life, the apostle exhorted the same church "not to sleep as do others, but watch and be sober." There is no other way in which we can excel. If we would pray to purpose, we must remember and believe that God is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." If we would profit in the word, we must "hearken

diligently" to God, that we may eat good, and that our souls may delight in fatness. If we would have inward happiness, we must "show diligence in our work and labour of love to the full assurance of hope unto the end, and be not slothful." If we would acquire and increase the various qualities of a holy character, we must give all diligence to add to our faith, virtue, then knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and charity.\*

VI. *Intemperance*.—Refer to Chaps. xx. 1; xxiii. 1-3, 29-35; xxxi. 4-6.

Self-indulgence in what are called "pleasures of the table," is often the secret of the dulness of spiritual apprehension and incapacity of sacred emotion, of which many complain. They pray for a better state of mind, but their prayers would speed much better if joined with a little fasting. A man whose "god is his belly," cannot be a friend of the Gospel of Christ; and without going to such an extreme, all indulgence in that direction, all animal excess, interferes with the power of the Gospel over our hearts. This is equally true in all conditions of life, whether you eat greedily out of an earthen dish on a deal table, or dine off gold plate with rulers and princes. Surfeiting dulls the human spirit, resists the operation of the Divine Spirit, and consumes in the most selfish way large sums that might be of inestimable service in clothing the naked feeding the hungry, and furthering the Gospel of Christ.

As to excess in wine and strong drink, no words can express the havoc that it works—physical, moral, spiri-

\* 2 Pet. i. 5-8.

tual. It quenches the spirit, debases the soul, impedes the Gospel, impoverishes the family, and, in all countries where such stimulants are largely used, enfeebles and destroys the human race. Yet multitudes of our people seem to grow up with no notion of the perilous nature of these things, and with no adequate horror of the sins and miseries resulting from an unguarded use of them. Boys and girls are taught to sip wine and strong drink as good for them, and strengthening to their constitution. "The poor man's beer" is spoken of as though it were a national glory, instead of a national mischief; placards in the streets proclaim it, and Parliament rings with its importance as a sort of British Palladium that may not be touched; and it raises a ferment of support in its favour that you cannot obtain for any effort in behalf of the poor man's salvation. Young gentlemen toss off their wine, glass after glass, before their beards are grown: and, by a sort of infatuation, everything seems to be done to throw men off their guard, and make drinking frequent and familiar. Now, we do not say that wine, or even strong drink, is to be absolutely forbidden; but we do say that it should always be regarded as a perilous thing, and used accordingly. We hold it an exaggeration, and in part an injustice, to make those who drink reasonably and moderately, answerable for all those who drink unreasonably and immoderately; but we maintain that a Christian should on no account take more than "a little wine for his stomach's sake," and that he should never relax his circumspection, lest a love of wine should grow on himself, or he should encourage the beginning of intemperance in others. Would that in every banqueting chamber there

were—if not engraven on the wall, at all events present to the minds of the guests—King Solomon's terrible description of brawls, impurities, exhaustion, and delirium, all issuing from the wine-cup! "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine." And with what insanity does the wine-bibber return to the very thing that hurt him! "When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."

VII. *Contention*.—Refer to Chaps. iii. 30; x. 12; xii. 18; xiii. 10; xv. 1, 2, 4, 18; xvi. 27, 28; xviii. 6-8; xxi. 9, 19; xxvi. 17-22; xxviii. 25; xxix. 22; xxx. 33.

This teaching well becomes the wise man, and prepares for the instruction of the Wiser and Greater than Solomon, who affirmed the blessedness of the meek, and, Himself meek and lowly in heart, reprov'd all envy, jealousy, and "strife, who should be the greatest." In His days the house of Israel was divided into sects, bitterly opposing each other. Alas! the Church has not taken warning, but has fallen into the same confusion. But God descends not into the angry disputes of men. The Holy Spirit as a dove shuns the stormy wind and tempest, and abides in quiet spots with lowly hearts. Both in private and in public life, let us follow the things that make for peace. It is better to suffer wrong than give any encouragement to "debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, back-bitings, whisperings, swellings, or tumults."\* It is far better to give the soft answer that turns away wrath, than to gain any

\* 2 Cor. xii. 20.



amount of *éclat* by the biting wit and sharp retort that stirs up anger.

Such are the warnings in the Book of Proverbs. When we inquire after the virtues it commends, we find much in favour of prudence, contentment, integrity, and cheerfulness. Above all, and inclusive of all, this book, especially in its first part, celebrates the praises of wisdom.

*The doctrine of Wisdom* is delivered in Chaps. i. 20–iv. 13; and in Chaps. viii. 1–ix. 12. The fourth chapter contains instructions which Solomon had derived from his father David. That most active-minded monarch not only laid up materials for Solomon's temple, but provided some of the deepest and clearest thoughts that Solomon wrought into his Book of Proverbs.

The wisdom spoken of comes from above, and regulates the moral tone and government of life. It is vividly personified. Wisdom stretches out her hands, cries aloud, confers gifts, utters warnings and promises—has ways which are pleasantness, and paths which are peace. In New Testament language, Christ is the Wisdom of God. He is, of God, made to us Wisdom, as well as Righteousness. The Christless are the foolish. The Christ-possessing and Christ-following are the wise. In the eighth chapter of Proverbs, the personification of Wisdom is so lofty as to suggest to Christian minds, without any strain or difficulty, the Logos, who was in the beginning with God, and was God, and by whom all things were made.\* How much of Christ the writer of Proverbs described, we know not; but the inspiring Spirit so guided him that he

\* John i. 1-3.



set forth an ideal of Wisdom which cannot be satisfied short of the doctrine of Christ—the personal Word, in whom “are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” and whose Gospel of grace and truth, wherever received and obeyed, causes this saying to be fulfilled in His disciples—“Wisdom is justified of her children.”

The wise and foolish are represented as guests in very different houses. Wisdom has builded a house, furnished her table, and sent out her invitation—“Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.” It is the feast of salvation, and of peace in believing; it is the tasting of “love which is better than wine,” in Church fellowship with Christ. But Folly also has a house, into which she calls those who pass by. She tells them that “stolen waters are sweet, and bread of secresy is pleasant.” This is the corrupt Church, the “mother of abominations.” She is “loud and stubborn.” Some of the simple ones she beguiles with wheedling words; and the scruples of others she overcomes with bold assertions. Degenerate Israel, or Judah, was the shameless harlot of Old Testament prophecy, in contrast with faithful Israel, or Judah, betrothed to Jehovah. In like manner, the faithful Church is the pure woman of the present dispensation, in process of adornment for her Husband: but the Church, unfaithful and idolatrous, is the harlot, whose bed is decked with delusions, and whose cup is full of besotting errors and cruel enmity to the saints. Alas! how many simple ones are following after her, and turning in to her! When the Harlot, clad in her Babylonish garments, is even now rocking to and fro on the Beast or earth-power that has carried her so long, infatuated Englishmen and English-

women are apologising for her, then admiring her, imitating her garments, by-and-bye drinking of her cup ! When we hear of one departing into that Roman apostasy, we cannot help thinking of those words of Solomon—"He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

Wisdom remonstrates with the simple, the scorers, and the fools. The first love their simplicity; give no heed to warnings; make no provision for eternity; and neglect knowledge. The second, in a scoffing spirit, deride knowledge. The third, more guilty still, hate knowledge, for it has its beginning in the fear of God; and the fools say in their hearts, "No God!" But Wisdom still "cries in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates." Christ utters His voice for salvation freely. Wisdom said, "Turn you at my reproof." Jesus Christ said, "Repent.—Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Wisdom said, "Behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you."\* "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come unto me, and drink.—This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive."†

\* Prov. i. 23.

† John vii. 37-39.

## ECCLESIASTES.

THE proper title of this book is "The Words of Koheleth, the son of David, King in Jerusalem." Koheleth was translated into Greek, Ecclesiastes—freely rendered in English "The Preacher." The words of the book are supposed to be first spoken, afterwards written down. They form not a soliloquy, but a monologue addressed to an audience, no comment or reply being heard, but the speaker throughout pouring forth his own experiences, observations, and reasonings, and revealing the moods and perplexities of his own mind.

The title Koheleth, though applied to a king, is a feminine form. This may be a mode of expressing Wisdom, which is also feminine; or it may be in accordance with the custom of naming persons of distinction after the function they fulfil. Thus Khaliph, the title given to the successors of Mahomet, is properly a feminine noun in Arabic, denoting succession.

"Koheleth, the son of David, King in Jerusalem," is evidently meant to be Solomon: yet it is much doubted whether Solomon himself wrote this book. Reasoning on

various internal evidences, including the use of Chaldaic terms and turns of expression, many scholars assign to Ecclesiastes a date after the Babylonish captivity, and suppose that the sage who wrote it put his monologue into the mouth of King Solomon, as appropriate to his experience; just as another unknown writer puts words into the mouth of Job, or as Milton puts them into the mouth of Adam. It is so far in favour of this view, that Ecclesiastes does not stand in the Hebrew Canon between Proverbs and Canticles, as in our Bibles, but has a place, apart from these, between Lamentations and Esther. And it is only fair to say that the theory of a late origin for this book is held, not merely by rationalistic critics, but by some of the most reverential scholars of the Old Testament in Great Britain as well as Germany.\* For our own part, we think their grounds too weak to sustain their conclusion; and we cleave to the old view of a real Solomonic authorship. The foreign words and phrases may surely be accounted for by Solomon's knowledge of Eastern languages and dialects, through his extensive commerce, through the embassies that visited him from many countries, or through the heathen ladies of his Court. A few expressions that are thought to imply a late authorship may perhaps be touches from the pen of a late editor. But we find it very difficult to believe that an anonymous writer, composing this book in or near the times of Ezra, and ascribing it to Solomon, could have obtained its admission into the sacred canon on an equal footing with those two books which bear Solomon's name. In such a case there would surely be some indication on the book itself, that it

\* See Professor Weir, in Bible Dictionary, Art. Eccles.

was to be read only as a conjecture of what Solomon might or should have said, much as a poet of our own has written speeches in blank verse for a great Judge of Israel in the Samson Agonistes. Indeed, this book transcends the power of personation and fictitious conjecture. Its whole tone harmonises too perfectly with what must have been Solomon's experience and reflection toward the end of his reign, to be the production of any one but himself.

The interpretation of Ecclesiastes is not easy. Commentators cannot agree on its theme, its object, or the scope of its discussion. It appears to us that the key to the book is to be found at the end, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole of man." From the conclusion, we perceive what the matter is. From the solution, we infer the problem that is solved. What we have before us is the quest of good—the search of a Hebrew mind for "the whole of man," his highest reach and greatest bliss—*το καλον* of the Greeks—the *summum bonum* of the Latins. To many men this search has been like the "Quest of the Holy Grail," in which they "follow wandering fires, lost in the quagmire." The Royal Preacher escapes the quagmire, but he leads on through strange and weary questionings, and much bitterness over worldly pleasures and ambitions, before he completes the quest, and fixes on the chief end of man.

In the inquiry, three conditions are observed—

1. The question relates to "the whole of *man*." There is no mention of Divine Grace, or Salvation, or heavenly things. The discussion does not relate to an Israelite, as the member of a holy nation, or to a Christian, as a mem-

ber of the Church. What is sought is the best condition of man as man, not as saint, or heir of God.

2. The sphere of the inquiry is strictly the sphere of man's life "under the sun." No account is taken of heavenly places, or of the New Jerusalem.

3. The discussion is conducted, and the decision reached, in view of judgment to come. This, which is a menace to the evil, and a thought of joy and comfort to the righteous, terminates the whole vista under the sun. Koheleth speaks of nothing beyond the Judgment. But this terminus he keeps always before the mind; and with this he concludes—"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."\* Quarles, in his curious paraphrase of this book, called "*Solomon's Recantation*," thus renders the last verse—

"No work shall pass untried ; no hand hath done  
What shall not plead at heaven's tribunal throne ;  
All secrets, good and bad, attend His eye ;  
His eyes behold where day could never pry."

When we come to consider the main contents of the book, we find it occupied with successive fits, moods, and exercises of the speaker's mind. He passes through a kind of labyrinth, with glimpses of comfort here and there, as air and light shoot down at intervals into some tunnel underground ; but he does not emerge into brightness and clearness of spirit till the very end. In this, as well as in other respects, the Book of Ecclesiastes resembles that of Job. Nothing is clear till the conclusion ; and the lesson

\* See Eccles. iii. 17 ; xi. 9 ; xii. 14.

for us, or use of edifying, is to be found, not in detached parts of it, but in the whole—the complete effect.

From the nature of this book, it follows that it is various as the moods of Solomon's busy and capacious mind. Now it is genial, and now vexed and misanthropic, now exceeding sad, and now witty and wise; now utterly bewildered, and now philosophically tranquil. It is very difficult to analyse the book, and arrange it under orderly divisions,—so difficult, that many have denied the existence of any consecutive order, and have described the form of this book as “rough and dismembered.”

There is, however, an order, which may be expressed as follows:—

I. Vanity under the sun proved from Solomon's experience. This occupies Chapters i., ii.

The preacher starts with the thought of this world's monotony. Generations come and go—the sun rises and sets—the winds blow to and fro—the rivers run into the sea, and the sea, by evaporation, returns to the fountains of the rivers. It is all a weary-go-round: we have nothing but repetitions and the shifting about of old materials: and “there is no new thing under the sun.”

1. Koheleth made proof of study. Chap. i. 12–18. The king had turned his active and penetrating intellect to examine the actions and lives of men under the sun; he meditated and reasoned deeply, and “had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” But the result of his study was no rest or satisfaction—“For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.”



2. Koheleth made proof of mirth and pleasure. Chap. ii. 1–11. Disappointed in study, the king tried frivolity. He would indulge his magnificent tastes in banquets, splendid grounds, and all the arts of luxury—and be a “merry monarch.” But it was a sheer failure. Charles the Second might enjoy himself as a merry monarch, for he was fit for nothing better; but the great spirit of Solomon felt itself mocked and befooled by mere gaiety and mirth: and the king, far from being made happy, fell into a deeper melancholy. The laughter was mad, and the pleasure was vanity.

3. Koheleth reflected on the emptiness of fame, and the vexation of having to leave unfinished plans to his successor. Chap. ii. 12–26. Solomon had the noble hunger of great minds for the good opinion of future generations, yet he perceived the uncertainty of posthumous fame. Worse still, he could not expect to live on, after death, in a wise and well-doing son. His heir-apparent, Rehoboam, was the subject of painful misgivings to the king. Why should he rack his brains to plan and execute great works, only to leave them to a prince who could not appreciate or continue them? “Yea I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.”

II. Vanity under the sun proved from Solomon’s observation. This occupies Chaps. iii.–viii. 15.

In this division of the book, it is first shown that man's happiness under the sun is restricted by his dependence on times, seasons, and circumstances. He has no power over the appointed time, and can do nothing but what the time is sent for. He has no choice but to weep or laugh, get or lose, keep silence or speak, make war or make peace, according as the time is ordained of God. The divine plan is doubtless all very good, but it is beyond the scope of man's vision,—for “no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”

Various facts of frequent occurrence are then referred to, as perplexing and baffling the inquirer's mind. There are many oppressions without a comforter, and many evils in social and civil life which turn it into a “sore travail.” Vanity even enters the house of God. Some who appear there are rash and irreverent, and carelessly make vows which they never pay. In the world around, the preacher sees injustice, violence, and avarice. Even those who are richly provided often lack the capacity of enjoyment, and are less happy than the poor. The survey embraces the outward fortunes and inward characters of men, the confusions of society, and the disorders that arise under human government. The argument always is that man's lot is full of vanity, and that there is nothing better than a cheerful enjoyment of what is assigned to us, without fretfulness or impatience. It is incorrect, however, to charge Ecclesiastes with any scepticism. God's purpose is always held to be wise, and His work all very good.

III. Vanity being thus exposed from experience and observation, the work of God is shown to go forward amidst

human labours, obstructions, and perversities. This occupies Chaps. viii. 16-xii. 7.

The wise man will not deny the existence of a Divine Providence, nor, because of its unfathomable character, cease to play his proper part in life. Rather he will humbly watch the development of God's work according to His purpose; and will follow after contentment and the best employment of time. Some of the phrases employed in this part of the book have an Epicurean sound; but this is corrected by the plaintive and weary tone of the discussion throughout. The wise man cannot say with the reckless heathen—"Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die:" but he says—Live cheerfully, cultivate discretion, and in all your labours and enjoyments keep in view that God will bring you into judgment.

This division of Ecclesiastes closes with an earnest appeal to the young to remember their Creator, and a striking picture of tremulous old age. It is no description of the godly, who ought to be serene in spirit to the last, and fruitful in obedience. "The righteous shall still bring forth fruit in old age,—to show that the Lord is upright."\* What is described is the dreary decay of one who in youth would "go on in every way of his heart and after every sight of his eyes." The admonition is, so to use the morning of life that its evening may be not sad or chagrined, but calm and blessed,—not the end of joy, but the threshold of a joy that lasts for evermore. "The spirit shall return to God who gave it." The thought is fitted to appal those who are debasing their spirits by sin, or en-

\* Ps. xcii. 12-15.

feebling and wasting them by frivolity and self-indulgence; but it may well comfort and sustain all those who seek to glorify God in their spirits, which are His. While the body, which is also His, lies in the dust, awaiting resurrection, the spirit lives with God, retains its consciousness, expands its forces, and tastes new delights on which can never be written *Vanity of vanities* or *Vexation of spirit*.

IV. The Epilogue. This, which is contained in Chap. xii. 8-14, summarises the whole teaching of the book.

The aim of Koheleth, in all that he has said, has been to speak "acceptable words," full of the honey-sweetness of Divine truth—"upright sayings," words of righteousness, with power to pierce the soul. This is characteristic of all wise teaching. It has a sweetness that glides into the heart, and at the same time a sharpness that penetrates the conscience, as a nail fastened in a sure place. Now, at the end, speaking to a son, after the manner of Solomon in the Proverbs, the Preacher exhorts him not to seek his welfare in many books, for literature no more than mirth can constitute man's welfare, or supply his chief good. "Fear God and keep His commandments." A conclusion quite similar to that of Job in his quest after wisdom. He sought for it in the mines and deep places of the earth; and the conclusion of the matter he found to be this—"The fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."\*

This was the height of the Hebrew "Chokmah," or philosophy of wisdom and life. As David is the great poet,

\* Job xxviii.

so is Solomon the great philosopher. And as David's Psalms, read in the light of Christ and the Gospel, are still at the height of sacred poetry; so Solomon's teachings and reflections, read in the same light, are at the summit of wisdom still. A child-like reverence for God, including the fear of displeasing Him, and the desire to obey Him from the heart—this is right: and to love Him with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind, is the great commandment.

This book has more peculiarity than almost any in the Bible. It is not for every mind; and the mind that it suits will not relish it, or profit by it, on every day. It is not wholesome for peevish spirits, that take from it a certain sanction for their discontent. The men who may read it often, and who can most thoroughly enter into its peculiar vein, are not feebly querulous persons, but those who observe widely, and revolve deeply, and feel intensely the maze and mystery of life. It was finely said by Lacordaire—"Weak and little minds do not discover the emptiness of visible things, because they are incapable of sounding them to the bottom. But a soul whom God has drawn nearer to the Infinite, very soon feels the narrow limits within which it is pent; it experiences moments of irrepressible sadness, the cause of which for a long time remains a mystery. In reading the lives of the saints, we find that nearly all of them have felt that sweet melancholy, of which the ancients said that there was no genius without it. In fact, melancholy is inseparable from every mind that looks below the surface, and every heart that

feels profoundly. It has but two remedies—Death, or God.” But death is no remedy. There is but one cure for a soul cast down and disquieted, it is to “hope in God.”

Many Christians say that they get little satisfaction from reading Ecclesiastes. No wonder; for the book was never written to satisfy an Israelite, much less a Christian. It has throughout a tossing of mind, and uneasiness of tone; and, though it may be of use in awakening spiritual sensibilities, it cannot meet deep spiritual wants. Solomon cannot give us rest. We must go to the Greater than Solomon, who does not so much descant on vexation of spirit as preach to us blessedness, and welcome us to salvation and peace. Solomon tells of the vanity under the sun, and we feel his words to be painfully true: but the Lord Jesus tells us of a good part that shall not be taken away, and which never palls on those who have once learned to value it; and He raises us in union with Himself above this sphere of earthly things under the sun, and puts us in heavenly places, as the heirs of an incorruptible and unfading inheritance. In the bounded sphere of life under the sun, men will never go further than remember their Creator, and look for death and judgment, and give some heed to the awfulness of God, and His demands on them as creatures. But they who are adopted through Christ, quickened and raised up with Him, know the Father, and have His commandments written on their hearts, and set their mind on things above, not on things on the earth. This is the secret of victory over the world, while we dwell in it,—“even our faith.” This is the rest

of the spirit amidst ever so many vanities and vexations. —“Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our body of humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory.”\*

\* Phil. iii. 20, 21.



## SONG OF SOLOMON.

THE Bible has been described as a stately Mansion, or Palace of Truth. If Genesis is the sublime vestibule, and the historical Books are so many halls and galleries hung with ancient portraits; if Job and Ecclesiastes are lofty chambers for quiet thought, and the Psalter is the music-room, and Proverbs form the business-room of the Mansion, then the Song of Solomon is the conservatory, full of sweet flowers and eastern plants of aromatic odour.

Yet the beauty of this book has not gained for it exemption from the severe criticism to which all the holy writings have been subjected. The ascription of the authorship to Solomon has been disputed, but on grounds so frivolous, that they need not seriously detain us. A question has also arisen regarding the continuity of the poem. Some critics regard it as a collection of sonnets or short idylls. It has even been alleged, that it consists of so many as seventeen or eighteen different songs or poetical fragments strung together. We shall not go further into this question, because the best scholars, almost without exception, agree with the common belief that the poem is one continuous song, pervaded throughout by a unity of meaning and design.

If it be one poem, is it dramatic? Our answer is, No; not in any proper sense of that term. It introduces various persons or characters, it has changing scenes and dialogue, but it has no dramatic plot, and no march of events toward an issue or denouement. It is not a drama even in the modified sense in which that designation may be given to the Book of Job. It is a poem of love in Oriental language and imagery, with rests, and pauses, and varying scenery and conversation. The parts are grouped together, rather than linked by a very definite chain of connective thought. But, as an American writer has well observed, "This looser method of arrangement or aggregation, with its abrupt transitions and sudden changes of scene, is no less graphic and impressive, while it is more in harmony with the Oriental mind and style of composition generally, than the rigorous external and formal concatenation which the more logical but less fervid Indo-European is prone to demand."\*

The chapters are arranged, as usual, in the most unskilful manner, and give no assistance whatever in the analysis or interpretation of this book. We find, however, in the text itself, sufficient indication of the following divisions:—

- (1.) Chap. i. 2—ii. 7.
- (2.) „ ii. 8—iii. 5.
- (3.) „ iii. 6—v. 1.
- (4.) „ v. 2—vi. 9.
- (5.) „ vi. 10—viii. 4.
- (6.) „ viii. 5—viii. 14.

More important even than the question of arrangement is that of the principle on which this song ought to be

\* Dr. Green of Princeton, Notes to Zöckler on the Song.

interpreted. Is it a mere poem of human love and marriage? Or is it an allegory throughout of affection in a higher sphere? Or is it to be explained typically, as containing earthly things, and by these foreshadowing the heavenly?

1. The merely literal and erotic interpretation may be dismissed without much ceremony. It is not recommended to us by the circumstance that it has found its chief support among the rationalists, and is in highest favour with those minds that are indisposed to what is deeply spiritual. It has no sanction whatever from antiquity, Jewish or Christian, and it entirely fails to justify the position of this book in the canon of Holy Writ. If the poem before us be no more than a song of King Solomon's admiration and passion for an Eastern beauty of his time, it is difficult to see what better right it has to be in our Bibles than the odes of Anacreon, Sappho, or Petrarch, or how it can be more profitable to the reader than the play of *Romeo and Juliet*.

2. The ancient interpretation is undoubtedly the allegorical. The tents of Abraham contained an allegory; Hagar and Sarah setting forth, as St. Paul assured the Galatians, the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem. It is no wonder if, in the palace and gardens of Solomon, there should also be an allegory of the relation established between Jehovah and His chosen Israel, or between Christ and the Church. In the present case, however, the allegory is supposed to have no earthly basis at all. Nothing is spoken of the literal Solomon. Under his name is meant the great King of saints. And Shulamith is not an actual personage whom Solomon loved, but a designation of the Church.

In support of this theory of interpretation, it is urged that—

(1.) It best accounts for the position of this book in the Old Testament, as canonical. The circumstance that the name of God does not occur so much as once in the Song has often been adverted to, as casting an element of doubt on its sacred character; but this difficulty quite disappears when the poem is read as an allegory of Divine love. The name of God could not be expressed without breaking the allegory; but the thought of God is everywhere, and His love is the highest theme of the Song.

(2.) Language is used in reference to the Bride, which can scarcely be applied to any actual woman—princess or shepherdess—but which may easily be understood as addressed to the “Daughter of Zion,” the collective people, or Church of God. Thus we can scarcely imagine a beautiful woman compared “to a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariots,” or even to a single caparisoned steed; but we can easily understand the figure as applied to Israel, for we read in the Prophets that God “led them through the deep as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble.”\* The same remark may be made in regard to the description of the neck as “like the tower of David builded for an armoury,” or of the appearance of Shulamith as “like the company of two armies, (Mahanaïm).”

(3.) This interpretation harmonises with the frequent language of the Old Testament regarding marriage union between Jehovah and Israel. Even in the Pentateuch, the formula to express Israel’s apostasy is that they “go a whoring after other gods.” Jehovah is, in the ancient

\* Isaiah lxiii. 13.

Scriptures, "a jealous God:" *i.e.*, an injured husband having an unfaithful wife. The 45th Psalm, a song of loves, employs the language of mutual affection and nuptial joy in regard to the Divine Messiah and His people. After the days of Solomon, this mode of speech became even still more common with the sacred writers; and this may fairly enough be traced to Solomon's Song. The Prophets—especially Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah—speak most plainly of the marriage covenant between Jehovah and Israel, the love of espousals, and the guilt involved in apostasy as an act of adultery peculiarly ungrateful and offensive to the God of Israel.

(4.) It is corroborated still further by the language of the New Testament regarding the love and union of Christ and the Church. He is the Bridegroom who has the Bride, and at the sound of whose voice John the Baptist, as the Bridegroom's friend, rejoiced. He is the Husband who loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.\* It is rather remarkable, however, that no quotation from the Song occurs in the New Testament.

The chief objection to the exclusively allegorical interpretation is that it makes way for caprices and ingenuities without end, and is apt to degenerate into mere devout guess-work. This applies alike to some of the Protestant expositors, who treat the Song as a poetical compendium of inward Christian experience, and to those Roman Catholic divines who have seen in Shulamith the blessed Virgin Mary, as "the Bride and Mother of God."

3. The typical interpretation seems to us, on the whole, safest and best. It admits a literal basis for the Song,

\* See Matt. ix. 15; John iii. 29; Eph. v. 25 32.

while it refuses to be content with a literal sense. It assigns to the book a full spiritual significance, but saves it from fantastic or eccentric meanings. There is an earthly theme—the love of Solomon and Shulamith. The Song celebrates a pure affection, and a wedded bliss. But it has, at the same time, a deeper meaning and a loftier aim, well entitling the poem to its place in Holy Scripture. Typically it suggests and depicts the love, sacred and intense, which unites the Lord himself to the people, who form, in inspired language, His “Bride.” Solomon is here—and then, typically, the Greater than Solomon. A beautiful Bride is here—and then, typically, Israel, and also the Church, adorned as a Bride for her Husband.

The poem is entitled “Song of Songs,” *par excellence*, as in the parallel expressions—heaven of heavens, King of kings, holy of holies. It is a superlative song, in which every thing is at its best. Gardens, fountains, flowers, fruits, spices, love, beauty, marriage, the joy of spring, the song of birds, these are in many songs; but in this there is a profusion of excellence,—a garden of nuts, an orchard of pomegranates, beds of spices, a mountain of myrrh, a hill of frankincense, flowers the most admired, beauty the most perfect, the Beloved altogether lovely, the Bride all fair and undefiled, the love strong as death, the marriage a royal marriage; every thing choice and incomparable.

The Beloved is Shelomo or Solomon, the prince of peace. He is the King, round whose palanquin stand sixty armed heroes,—the shepherd who feeds his flock among the lilies,—and the owner of a fruitful vineyard. Above all, He is one, whose voice thrills the heart, whose approach brings



joy and gladness, whose love supplies the most tender consolation, and whose person combines all the highest qualities of beauty and strength. So speaks Shulamith of her Beloved and her Friend.

She, on the other hand, is the seeker and finder of peace, (Shalom), in Shelomo. At the beginning of the Song, she is ill at ease, black with exposure to the scorching sun, forced to work in vineyards that are not her own, harshly treated by her kinsmen after the flesh, anxiously inquiring after the Good Shepherd whom she loved. None of "the companions" can supply His place. But soon she finds Him, or is found of Him, and she is at peace, for He sees in her no blackness; He calls her His love, His dove, His undefiled.

The Bridegroom is described by the Bride; and the Bride in turn by the Bridegroom. Their delight is in one another. Absence is pain; reunion is intense happiness. Each finds in the other "love better than wine."\* The height of the joy is in the marriage. The day of espousals is to Solomon the day of the gladness of his heart. And this was surely in the prophet's memory when he wrote—"As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."† The designation of the Bride in the Song, as the Sister-Spouse, of itself discourages the literal interpretation, and suggests a spiritual meaning. Now the Sister-Spouse is fully blessed in conscious union with the King, and says, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me."

Spiritual enjoyment of the most intense character is easily lost. The Bride misses her Lord—is it in a dream:

\* Compare chap. i. 3, 4, with chap. iv. 10.

† Isa. lxii. 5.



—the heart waking while the body slept. He comes to the door, and shows a willingness to enter; but she delays to admit him. When she does rise to open to the Beloved, she is too late, for He is gone, and now she has to go out into the street on those dainty feet which she had grudged to put upon the floor, and hasten to and fro inquiring diligently after Him. It is well with her, when, and only when she is with the Lord, resting in His protection, trusting His loving-kindness, going up out of the wilderness leaning on His arm, or dwelling in the gardens, singing of His goodness and His beauty, His grace and His truth.

Into detailed exposition, it does not accord with our plan to enter. There are many sweet lessons and suggestions of the mind of Christ, and the love of saints, to be gathered from a minute study of this book; and some preachers, like M'Cheyne and Krummacher, have turned select passages to excellent homiletic use; but great caution is to be observed, lest a cold unimaginative mind, on the one hand, should so dissect this glowing oriental poetry as to destroy its living beauty, nay, should even force upon it an indelicacy from which the original is innocently free, and, on the other hand, lest an over-active fancy should, by insisting on a separate spiritual meaning for every figure of speech, every allusion to natural objects, and every turn of expression in poetical descriptions of the human form, weaken the force, and mar by very extravagance the general impression of the Song. So have the types in the Books of Moses been often injured by fantastic interpretation, and the Parables of Christ over-

strained by the pressing of spiritual analogies into every detail.

The charm of this Song to every Christian heart, is its constant suggestion and eulogy of Christ. The type Solomon is quite forgotten in the Pre-eminent Antitype. Christ is the winner of souls—His name is fragrant—His love passes knowledge—His person is sacred, head and foot being seen as of fine gold\*—His strength is as “pillars of marble”—His “mouth is most sweet,” full of gracious words, and breathing on us the Holy Ghost. “Yea, He is altogether lovely.” All who really know Him love Him; and the more they know Him, the more they must love Him, and following Him, depart from all iniquity.

Communion with Christ, however, may be interrupted, though union is not broken. From their own experience, saints understand the alternations of withdrawal and manifestation on the part of the Beloved, related in the Song. He is not always in the garden, or always at the table with them, but is in Lebanon or in the top of Hermon; and when they miss Him, He often comes to them speedily and as with a sweet surprise, like a hart leaping on the mountains, and bounding on the hills. “His love in my heart casteth a mighty beat; He knoweth that the desire I have to be at Himself paineth me. I have sick nights and frequent fits of love-fevers for my well-Beloved. Nothing paineth me now but want of presence. I think it long till day. I challenge time, as too slow in its pace, that holdeth my only, only true One, my well-Beloved from me. Oh if we were together once!”†

\* Chap. v. 11-15.

† Rutherford's Letters (to William Gordon).

Before the first advent, those who waited for the consolation of Israel said, "Make haste, O Messiah!" They longed for the appearing of Him of whom their prophets had spoken, and their ancient bards had sung: and the Lord was well pleased to see the desire for Him in the hearts of pious Hebrews. He would not come into the world till the fulness of time; but He loved to hear in many a Jewish family, in solitudes devoted to prayer, and in the courts of the Temple, the petition ascend for His coming, and for the dayspring from on high. Such prayers and hopes He fostered, bending His ear to listen, "O my Dove, let me hear thy voice!"

At last came John the Baptist, to prepare His way. This was the Bridegroom's friend. Then was the Lord Himself manifested to Israel. He gathered saints, He declared the Father, He gave Himself for the Church, and then left the world, and went to the Father; He returned to the mountains of spices. The Church now loves an unseen Saviour. She longs for her absent Lord, to whom she is joined in the marriage covenant, and for whose presence she is being prepared and adorned with holy beauties by the Holy Ghost. "Rise up, my Beloved!" is her prayer. She waits the happy hour, when the Lord will gather His saints as the Bride, and take them to the high mountains to be for ever with Him. "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Comfort one another with these words, all ye who love His appearing! We have no relish for controversy about the time and manner of the Advent; but we do want more realisation of it as our "blessed hope," more thirst and more meetness for His presence. Let it be added, that

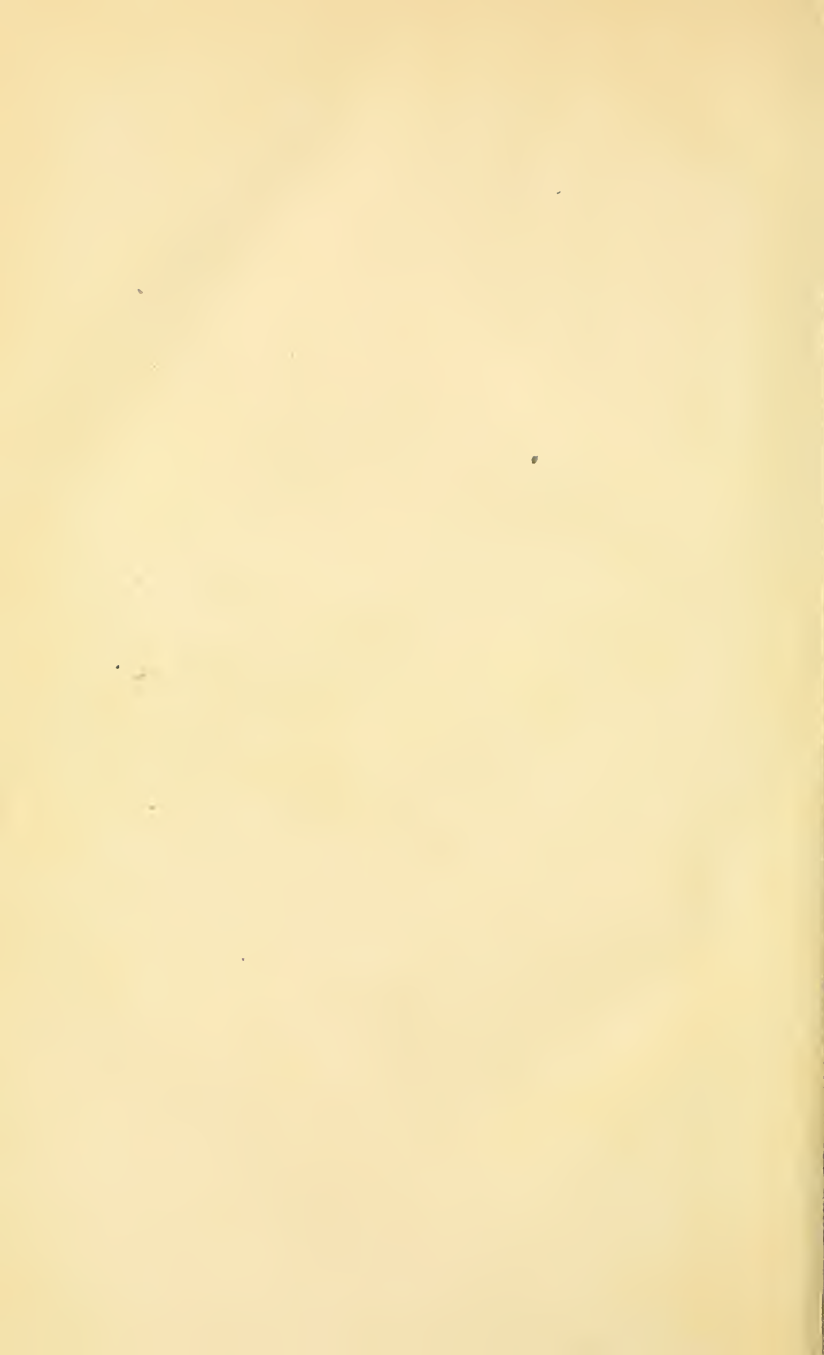
this comes in well after the Book of Ecclesiastes. The weariness of heart under the sun, is best cured by the fervour of spirit expressed in the Song of Songs. The world's vanity has no power to occupy or chafe those who are full of a Divine and heavenly love. The world's gaieties are nothing to hearts which are possessed by the "blessed hope," or thrilled with a joy unspeakable.

"Beyond the smiling and the weeping,  
Beyond the waking and the sleeping,  
Beyond the sowing and the reaping,  
Love, rest, and home!  
Sweet hope!  
Lord, tarry not, but come!"

THE END.











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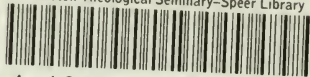





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